National Hedge Laying Society

Assessment Process and Accreditation Standards

NHLS Accreditation Scheme Documentation

Document AS1

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1. Introduction

The National Hedgelaying Society offers accreditation in the traditional craft of hedgelaying.

A series of progressive, practical, Lantra approved assessments provide a three-tier system of accreditation in hedgelaying. The scheme is designed to ensure that the highest standards of craftsmanship are maintained.

Skills are assessed against standard criteria to attain one of the three levels of accreditation;

- Bronze: Competent Standard
- Silver: Proficient Standard
- Gold: Advanced Standard

1.1 Who can be Assessed?

Anyone aged 16 and over can take part in an assessment, noting however, that the activity is of a physical nature and a disclaimer will need to be signed stating you are physically able to do the assessment.

1.2 Training

Candidates are expected to have undertaken training and a practice assessment before the actual assessment day. Training events can be found on the “Events” page on the National Hedgelaying Society (NHLS) website. Often NHLS affiliated associations offer local support for hedgelayers wishing to progress or gain experience. A list of relevant organisations can be found under the “Support Us” tab on the website.

1.3 How to Apply

Assessment days for the various regional hedgelaying styles will be advertised on the “Events” page of the NHLS website or an expression of interest can be placed by filling in form AS5.1.

Candidates will be required to fill in an application form outlining their experience and training, along with a photograph of an example of their recent work.

Applications should be submitted as described on the web page at least 6 weeks before the training date to allow paperwork and invoicing to be processed.

The fee includes registration, examination costs plus a PDF certificate if successful. A paper version and physical skills card can be purchased through Lantra for an additional cost.

1.4 The Assessors

All assessments are carried out by NHLS accredited assessors who have undertaken training in the assessment process, safety standards and have proven skills in hedgelaying to at least Silver standard.

Please note that a candidate cannot be assessed by the same person that trained them or is their employer.

1.5 The Assessment

The assessment will evaluate the quality of craftsmanship demonstrated in the chosen style and will be marked according to the criteria set out in the "Assessment Marking" section on page 4.

At all levels, hedgelaying must be the unaided work of the candidate.

1.6 Tools and Materials

Candidates are required to provide their own tools for the assessment

Where appropriate for the style being assessed, stakes and binders will be provided.

1.7 Safety Code of Practice

- Candidates should ensure their attire and conduct throughout the assessment are in the best interests of their safety and the safety of others on the site.
- Appropriate PPE must be worn.
- If using a chainsaw the candidate must have an in-date CS30 chainsaw certificate issued by a recognised certifying body. (NPTC, Lantra etc)
- Tools, equipment and facilities to be used during an assessment must comply with safety regulations.
- Only safe working practices are to be demonstrated.
- A site-specific risk assessment is carried out prior to the start of the assessment by the assessor.

2. Assessment Environment

Each assessment will take place on a length of hedge selected to be suitable for the accreditation level being applied for. The requirements are different for the three levels available and outlined below.

Bronze Candidates will be required to lay not less than 6 metres of hedge. The length assigned will depend on the quality of the material available.

The hedge will be suitable for laying using hand tools but if a chainsaw is used the candidate must meet the conditions in the "Safety Code of Practice" on page 2.

Silver As stipulated for the Bronze level above but with a minimum length of 8 metres. Silver and Gold level candidates will be expected to use a chainsaw.

Gold As for Silver above but a minimum of 10 metres length.

The hedge used for assessment will be a mature hedge, deliberately chosen to be challenging. The hedge will have been laid at some stage previously and will not be a "maiden hedge".

In all cases, the work must be completed in one 5 hour period.

3. Assessment Marking

The work done during an assessment will be marked on a points basis and the assessment divided into several sections, each marked individually.

Most sections will have a maximum number of marks assigned to it and a minimum score that will need to be achieved in order to pass that section. The minimum scores (pass marks) increase depending on the accreditation level being assessed.

The assessment will be marked on a points basis. The table below shows the sections which will be individually assessed on the work undertaken.

Each section has a maximum score and a minimum mark required to pass at each accreditation level.

Please note that to pass the assessment the candidate must achieve at least the minimum mark in each section.

Each assessment will be specifically for either Bronze, Silver or Gold accreditation. Excess marks will not result in higher accreditation levels being awarded. Lower marks can lead to a lower accreditation level being awarded, however, in most cases, the lower accreditation level will already have been achieved.

3.1 Section Marks

The following table shows a summary of the assessment sections:

		Pass Mark		
Section	**Points**	**Bronze**	**Silver**	**Gold**
1 Pleaching	20	10	12	15
2 Stool & Heel	20	10	12	15
3 Stakes & Binders	20	10	12	15
4 Appearance	30	15	18	23
5 Tools	10	5	6	7
6 Gateway Start & Finish (Gold only)	20	n/a	n/a	15
7 Questions and Answers (Bronze Only)	10	5	n/a	n/a
8 Health and Safety*	Pass/Fail	n/a	n/a	n/a
9 Root Lay, Back Lay & Side Lay (Silver and Gold only)	20	n/a	12	15

*Note that the “Health & Safety” section is marked on a Pass or Fail basis only.

n/a - Not applicable.

3.2 Assessment Sections

3.2.1 Pleaching, Stool & Heel, Stakes & Binders and Appearance

These four sections have many desirable features which are common to all styles but also many which are very "style-specific". For this reason, the description of which features are important for the assessment are in the separate NHLS document AS2 – "Hedgelaying Style Guides for Assessment". This can be downloaded from the NHLS web site, "Accreditation" page.

3.2.2 Tools

- Billhooks and axes must have a sharp edge with no cracks or chips.
- Billhook cutting edge to have a narrow shoulder.
- Use the tool appropriate for the job in hand.
- If a chainsaw or other power tools are used, they must be in good working condition.

3.2.3 Gateway Start & Finish (Gold only)

- Satisfactory interface of the laid hedge to a gateway or other gap at start and finish of length.

3.2.4 Questions and Answers (Bronze only)

At the end of the assessment each candidate will be asked a few questions related to hedgelaying, regulations and the environment.

3.2.5 Health and Safety

This section relates to the candidate's working practices during the assessment and will be scored on a Pass/Fail basis.

- Correct PPE for tools being used.
- Safe use of tools and placement while working.
- Work area safe and clear of brash.
- Good awareness of possible risks.

3.2.6 Root Lay, Back Lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

These skills and their use are style-specific. For more details see the assessment style guide document referenced in section 3.2.1.

3.3 Marking Sheets

The candidate will be required to fill in some personal details and sign a marking sheet at the start of the assessment.

Once the assessment is completed the candidate will receive a copy of the marking sheet containing the scores for each section and including notes added by the assessor.

Marking sheets for each style can be downloaded from the NHLS web site, "Accreditation" page.

4. Assessment Results

4.1 Passing an Assessment

Upon receiving the assessor's signed and completed mark sheet with relevant reports, results are submitted to NHLS for verification. Certificates will be issued by Lantra to successful candidates, usually within four weeks of the assessment. Once Assessment Certificates are issued, the candidate will receive NHLS Accreditation at the appropriate level. They can register to become a contractor at that level and be listed on the "Find a Hedgelayer" map on the NHLS web site.

There is an annual fee to be a registered contractor. See the web site "Membership" page for details.

If a certificate is lost, a replacement PDF can be requested through the NHLS.

4.2 Failing an Assessment

Where a candidate fails to achieve the required pass mark, assessors will clearly indicate the reason for failure and areas for improvement. A period of three months is advised before a candidate applies for re-assessment.

4.3 Appeals

Any appeal made against an assessment result must be submitted in writing or by email to the NHLS within two weeks of the assessment date. Full details must be given of the reason for the appeal. The NHLS will consider this and report to the candidate within one month of receipt of the appeal. The full Appeals Policy is available on the NHLS "Accreditation" webpage.

4.4 Cancellation and Refunds

A candidate can cancel up to 21 days prior to the agreed commencement date to receive a 50% refund. Cancellation received 20 days or less up to and including the commencement date are non-refundable. A full refund will be given up to 48 hours after payment only.

Unless weather conditions make the assessment unsafe, assessment days will proceed in all weathers. In the case of weather requiring the course to be cancelled, your assessor will notify you and you will be refunded.

If the NHLS cancels the assessment day for any other reason, candidate payment will be fully refunded.

5. Consistency of Standard when Accredited

If the Society receives a substantiated complaint about the standard of an NHLS accredited hedge-layer's work the Society will investigate this and give a response to the complainant. The Society reserves the right to ask the contractor to attend for re-examination of standards of workmanship if this is deemed necessary. The NHLS may remove the accreditation if standards are not met. The individual shall meet all the costs involved.

For more information on assessment and accreditation see the NHLS website or contact the Society by email.

6. Contact Details

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