

Pathway to MSGLD

The Accreditation Process

2026

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FOREWORD

The Society of Garden + Landscape Designers is committed to maintaining high standards of professional practice. It actively encourages its members in their efforts to raise and maintain these standards in garden design.

The Society believes it is crucial to uphold and preserve high standards of assessment to maintain its professional integrity in the eyes of the public and of our peers in related disciplines, and the accreditation process is the way the SGLD achieves this.

Care is taken to maintain consistency in accreditation, irrespective of individual taste or style, and also irrespective of the candidate's individual career path in garden design. Care is also taken to maintain transparency by actively promoting and explaining the accreditation process to the membership.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The SGLD recommends that candidates make use of the resources of the Registration Starts Here presentation and of Accreditation Design Advice Sessions when preparing for accreditation.

Registration Starts Here (RSH)

This is a presentation designed to introduce candidates to the requirements for accreditation, to demonstrate the standard of work expected, and to answer questions on how best to prepare for accreditation. The presentation shows example drawings and documents produced by Registered Members. It can be downloaded from the website. The RSH resource and this document prepare a candidate for the information discussed at an accreditation design advice session.

Accreditation Design Advice Session

The advice session allows a candidate to show samples of and discuss their work with an accreditor. The candidate will be able to question the accreditor on all aspects of the accreditation process. Work will not be formally appraised, but the candidate will be advised if the samples shown are in line with the standards required. Advice sessions will usually be held as small groups and are organised by the SGLD admin team as they are currently taking place via Zoom. Attendance at an accreditation design advice session can be booked via the SGLD office.

The Accreditation

Candidates will be assessed in detail on three completed projects. They may choose either to submit all three projects together in a **Single Submission** or to submit one project at a time as a **Multiple Submission**. Registered Membership will not be achieved until all the required work has been successfully assessed and accepted.

Submitted projects should have been completed within 5 years of their submission.

Candidates' work is assessed by an Accreditation Panel consisting of three members of the Accreditation Committee, all of whom are experienced Registered Members, The Chair of the Accreditation Committee will normally chair the Panel.

Work will be assessed for professional competence in the areas listed on the Accreditors' Assessment Form (see Appendix 2). Written feedback will be given on all work submitted.

For each submitted project, candidates must be available on the day of the Accreditation to receive a phone or Zoom call from the accreditors. This is so that the candidate can respond to any queries that may arise from the assessment.

It should be noted that:

- Companies cannot become Registered Members, but individuals who work for companies can.
- Designers outside the UK are welcome to apply but all material including technical specifications must be presented in English.
- Upon acceptance as a Registered Member, the annual subscription fee becomes payable. Candidates may not adopt the title MSGLD and will not receive other benefits of this level of membership until payment has been completed.

THE ACCREDITATION SUBMISSION

Candidates are required to submit three completed projects.

It should be noted that only the candidate's own work is acceptable, apart from the survey drawing if this has been produced by others (see Site Survey note below). Collaborative work will not be accepted. However, if the submission includes drawings that have been drafted by others this must be made clear at Accreditation and the candidate must have commissioned and signed off the drawings. Candidates must have a complete understanding of the drawings and be able to demonstrate that all the design decisions are their own. The candidate must also demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the project from survey through to construction.

All projects submitted should have been undertaken by the candidate under a contractual agreement with the client. (College or study work, show or exhibition gardens, or a candidate's own garden, will not be acceptable)

The submitted projects should vary in character, size and scope as much as possible. They should all demonstrate the full range of competencies required of a garden designer. Designs for small spaces are acceptable if there is enough design content and detailing to be assessed.

Where a candidate is working on a series of projects across a single site on a long-term basis, more than one project from the site may be considered for submission provided each project is discrete and distinctive, and meets all other conditions listed here.

At least two of the main projects should have been actively monitored by the candidate from commencement of works to completion (i.e. periodic site inspections, not necessarily full project monitoring).

DRAWINGS AND DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED

Please note that with the exception of the Management, Development & Sustainability Statement, all the drawings and documents listed here are to be submitted for each of the three projects.

FOR EACH PROJECT:

1. CV
2. Agreed Client Brief
3. Client-Designer Contract Documentation
4. Site Survey
5. Site Analysis
6. Design Rationale
7. Presentation Plan, cross section - suitable to be submitted to the client.
8. Planting Plan(s)
9. Plant Schedule
10. Setting Out Plan(s)
11. Construction Details - *a minimum of TWO of the most significant features*
12. Specification & other Contract Documentation for works on site
13. Management and Development Plan with Sustainability Statement (Project 3 only)
14. CDM Risk Assessment (Project 3 only)
15. Photographic Record - *before and after completion, and during construction for projects that have been monitored.*

NOTES ON WORK TO BE SUBMITTED

- Submissions may be drawn by hand or by computer.
- It is not necessary to present rendered or coloured drawings.
- All drawings should include a full title block.
- Plans should include a scale bar and have an indication of the scale and paper size.
- Plans must be to an appropriate and recognised scale so that sizes can be checked with a scale rule; conventional scales for plans are 1:50, 1:100 or 1:200 for very large schemes; planting plans 1:50 or 1:100; construction drawings 1:10 or 1:20; the equivalent Imperial scales may be used if working in countries where these are standard.
- Plans should not be reduced and should be in a large enough format to ensure all details are legible.
- The digital part of the submission should be in PDF format. (See Application Form on the SGLD website).
- All work should be clearly labelled (as instructed on the Submission Checklist).
- In addition to the digital submission via Dropbox, hard copies are required of the Presentation Plan and the Planting Plan(s). These should be printed to scale on the appropriate paper size and should be sent directly to the address of the Accreditation Co-Chair, which the office will supply. To reduce the environmental impact, hard copies should be paper and folded to A4 size. No plastic or cardboard folders or wallets are required. **It is important that the hard copy submission can be folded into an A4 paper envelope**

Agreed Client Brief

The brief should be contained in the candidate's report to the client, identifying all the discussed design elements for written approval.

Client-Designer Contract Documentation

This should include the candidate's quotation or estimate and payment schedule for design costs, and the candidate's terms of engage

Site Survey

Surveys carried out by others are acceptable. Ensure that all relevant information is included, e.g. doors, windows, DPC levels; trees should be identified including those overhanging from neighbouring properties.

Site Analysis

This may be a separate drawing or written text or may be noted on the survey. It should contain both diagrammatic as well as written observations of the site, geology and soil, highlighting functional, practical, aesthetic and legal issues. Analysis of environmental impact may also be appropriate for some projects.

Design Rationale

This should include an explanation of the design objectives, relative to the brief, the site, and the existing architecture where appropriate; an overall design rationale explaining the thinking behind the design; and an explanation of how the design objectives have been achieved through spatial design, hard landscape detailing and planting. Where appropriate it should also include how the management, future sustainability and environmental impact of the landscape project have been considered at the design stage.

Most importantly it should answer three questions:

- WHAT is the basis for the design and what are its objectives?
- WHY is it appropriate for this client, brief and site?
- HOW have your design objectives been achieved?

Presentation Plan

The Presentation Plan should show a completed design proposal for the whole site, e.g. all front or all rear garden area, unless there is a compelling reason otherwise. This is the drawing usually submitted to a client to explain the proposals.

Neither a Concept Plan, which refers to the initial or Sketch Ideas for a scheme, nor a Master Plan which is generally used for larger projects and drawn at a smaller scale (1:500+), are acceptable alternatives to a Presentation Plan for submission at an accreditation since none of these drawing types show sufficient detailed design for accreditation.

Presentation Plans should indicate North, and should include a datum point, final levels and spot heights. Sufficient levels should be noted to allow the design intent to be fully understood.

For large projects (1 hectare +), a detailed design for a discrete area, e.g. a walled garden, may be acceptable as a project for accreditation provided that such a design can be seen in the context of the surrounding area and in relation to the principal buildings. In these instances, it may be appropriate that a Master Plan is submitted alongside the Presentation Plan.

In addition to the 2D plan, at least one cross-section should be included with the Presentation Plan to clearly demonstrate the mass and void of a design, and how any changes in level have been dealt with. For sites with complex level changes more than one cross-section may be appropriate.

The design should meet the requirements of the agreed brief and site survey and the design objectives, and should be coherent and complete, all design issues having been considered and addressed. See Appendix 1 for notes on the assessment of design at accreditation.

Planting Plan(s)

The Planting Plan(s) should be on a separate sheet(s) from the Presentation Plan. It should be clear enough for use by a contractor on site. All plants should be appropriate for the site, location, and maintenance requirements as stipulated by the client, as well as contributing to the overall structure and integrity of the design. The labelling system must be clear and use botanical names. Planting Plans should demonstrate that you have a thorough understanding and knowledge of plant sizes and growth rates.

Plant Schedule

This should include quantities, varieties, pot sizes and, where appropriate, height of shrubs, height or girth of trees, rootstocks, bare root/ root balled, and form, e.g. multi-stem, standard, half-standard etc. The Schedule must be on a separate sheet.

Setting Out Plan(s)

These should show the layout, dimensions and setting out method for hard landscape elements together with levels and spot heights (existing and proposed) and provisions for surface water drainage. All information should be clearly detailed at an appropriate scale for ease of interpretation by the contractor. No design decisions should be left to the contractor. All drawings should be cross-indexed to the Specification where necessary.

Construction Details

These should be for the two most significant hard landscaping features. All Construction Details should be drawn to an appropriate scale, fully dimensioned and clearly labelled. Industry standard graphics should be used. The drawings should demonstrate a sound knowledge of construction methods. All drawings should be cross-indexed to the Specification.

Specification & other Contract Documentation for works on site

These should include a full Specification document with preliminaries and hard and soft landscape specifications. The document should be detailed enough for tendering purposes and show an appreciation of site management and construction schedules. Relevant clauses should be cross-referenced to Construction Details, Setting Out drawings etc. There must be no contradiction between drawings and specification that could lead to confusion or legal complications.

NOTE: The Accreditation Panel understand that many designers produce simple Scope of Work documents for their regular contractors and may not have had to do a full Specification suitable for tendering for the selected projects. Where a candidate does not have a project that has required this, it is acceptable for them to convert the Scope of Works into a full Specification in order to meet the Accreditation requirements.

Where appropriate to the nature of the project the following should also be included:

- invitation to tender documentation.
- completed Joint Council for Landscape Industries forms or equivalent.
- project management file.
- Construction (Design & Management) (CDM regs.) documentation
- budget targets or costings for construction.

CDM Risk Assessment (Project 3 only)

See CDM examples on the SGLD website

<https://sgld.org.uk/resources/>

Management and Development Plan, with Sustainability Statement

A separate Management and Development Plan, with a Sustainability Statement, will be required for the third project only. This should:

- Describe how and by whom the completed garden will be managed, maintained and developed. What are the seasonal requirements to maintain the scheme.
- Include examples of any maintenance instructions and requirements seasonally for hard landscape elements and planting
- State how the project has impacted the environment of the site. Describe interventions that have mitigated or improved the garden environment:

Points to consider or include where possible and applicable:

- Criteria for material and product selection in design – Footprint, durability, and sourcing
- Careful soil management and protection with minimum hard footprint
- Tree protection, wildlife corridors, diversity of habitats
- Selection of plants to enhance local ecology with low input requirements.
- Biosecurity considerations
- Adoption of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) and efficient on-site water management such as rainwater harvesting systems
- Avoidance of Pesticides and Herbicides on site
- Recycling of materials on site
- Ethical Sources for materials and plants
- Travel efficiencies to site of labour and materials
- Recycling and reduction in packaging and waste
- Responsible disposal of hazardous materials and waste
- On site compost facilities
- Low energy and low carbon footprint considered.
- Sustainable design that can be managed with low energy inputs for future.

Photographic Record

This should include a range of photographs to show the site before (A), during (B) and after (C) construction. *Please inform the accreditors if you have not monitored this project and are unable to get during photos.* Please number each view with the relevant stage of project e.g. 'View 1A – from main building' etc., so that views can be cross-matched as the project progresses

At least ten photographs should be taken after construction, and should include:

- views, (where possible) from all the main internal and external viewpoints
- how the building(s) sits in its new setting
- all construction details.

ASSESSMENT

The candidate's submission will be assessed using the criteria on the Accreditors' Assessment Form (see Appendix 2).

Each **component** of the project will be assessed as follows:

- Accept - demonstrates an acceptable level of professional competence.
- Refer - incomplete.
- Not to Required Standard

The submission **overall** will be assessed as follows:

- ACCEPT - Completion of all components of a project to an acceptable level of professional competence.
- REFER – Submission does not demonstrate an acceptable level of professional competence in at least one component of a project, or failure to complete at least one component of a project.
- NOT TO REQUIRED STANDARD – Submission does not demonstrate competence in the majority of a project's components.

If work is referred the candidate will be asked to send the required drawings to the SGLD office within six months of the accreditation date. (This time limit can be extended in special circumstances on request to the Chair of the Accreditors' Panel & Committee). Referred work will either pass or will not be accepted.

If the candidate's submission is not accepted, they are welcome to re-apply at any time with an alternative project.

APPEAL

Candidates have the right to appeal. Please note that an appeal must be made within three months of an accreditation. The appeal should be sent in writing to the SGLD office and will be referred to the SGLD Council for an independent assessment by two members of Council who are not part of the Accreditation Committee.

APPENDIX 1 - The Assessment of Design at Accreditation.

Overall assessment

- Does the design meet the requirements of the brief?
- Is the design coherent? Is it consistent with the stated design rationale and does it fulfill the design objectives?
- Is the design complete? Have all design issues been considered and addressed?

Detailed assessment of the components of design

Design is a decision-making process, and candidates should be able to justify all of their design decisions. They should expect that the accreditors will consider how the candidate has addressed the following: *(This list is not prescriptive, and not all components may be relevant to any given scheme)*

- The use of devices such as unity, repetition, fragmentation, symmetry, asymmetry, formality, naturalism.
- The entrance(s) into the garden, the circulation around it and the suitability and ease of use of functional spaces.
- The proportions of spaces to each other, to the house and other relevant buildings, to other structures, and to structural or mass planting.
- The proportions of masses within the garden - both planted (i.e. trees, hedging and mass shrub planting) and built structures.
- The relationship of the house to the garden.
- The treatment of junctions between different elements and materials, e.g. paths, buildings, structures, boundaries.
- The treatment of sight lines - whether reinforced, controlled or obscured.
- The balance between hard and soft landscaping.
- The choice and use of materials.

Appendix 2 - Accreditors' Assessment Criteria

	Accept	Refer	Not to Required Standard
Agreed Client Brief	Identifies all the discussed design elements. Identifies elements not the responsibility of the designer, where appropriate. Identifies future maintenance implications, and management where relevant. Identifies budget constraints. Unambiguous.	Incomplete and/or ambiguous.	Fails to identify client requirements.
Client-Designer Contract Documentation	Clear and comprehensive, addressing all relevant issues.	Incomplete or lacking clarity.	Incomplete and lacking clarity.
Site Survey	Clear and includes all relevant information.	Incomplete, lacking some relevant information or lacking clarity.	Not a usable survey, as missing relevant information and lacking clarity.
Site Analysis	Clearly identifies all relevant information.	Incomplete, lacking some relevant information or lacking clarity.	Gives erroneous information.
Design Rationale	Clearly sets out the thinking behind the design, the design objectives and the elements used to achieve those objectives. Clearly explains why the design is appropriate for the client and the site, and how it fulfils the agreed brief.	Lacking in clarity. Does not set out or explain the design thinking adequately.	Not consistent with the agreed brief. Design objectives and elements used to achieve them inappropriate and/or not feasible for the site and/or brief.
Presentation Plan - Design	Meets the requirements of the agreed brief. Consistent with the design rationale and fulfils the design objectives. All design issues have been addressed.	Not consistent with all parts of the design rationale and/or does not fulfil all of the design objectives. Not all design issues have been addressed.	Fails to meet the requirements of the agreed brief. All or most of the design is inconsistent with the design rationale and fails to fulfil the design objectives. Major design issues not addressed.

	Accept	Refer	Not to Required Standard
Presentation Plan - Communication	Clear graphics and annotation. Communicates the design clearly to the client and the contractor.	Lack of clarity in the graphics and/or annotation. Some elements of the design are ambiguous.	Ambiguity and/or lack of clarity such that it is not possible to determine the design intention accurately.
Planting Plan(s)	Clear enough for use by a contractor on site. Choice and use of plants appropriate for the site, location and maintenance requirements. Choice and use of plants appropriate to the overall structure and integrity of the design.	Lacking clarity. Some plants inappropriate for the site, location and/or maintenance requirements. Some plants at inappropriate densities or in unsustainable combinations regarding respective habits and/or growth rates. Scheme not large or varied enough to demonstrate the designer's understanding of planting design.	Plant choice and use not consistent with the design objectives and/or the agreed brief. Majority of plants inappropriate for the site, location and/or maintenance requirements. Majority of plants at inappropriate densities or in unsustainable combinations regarding habits and/or growth rates.
Plant Schedule	Clear and comprehensive, enabling accurate supply of plants.	Not clear and/or lacking sufficient information for accurate supply of plants.	Inaccurate. Inconsistent with planting plan(s).
Setting Out Plan(s)	Clear and comprehensive, enabling accurate setting out and drainage of the design. Fit for purpose.	Some dimensions and/or information missing and/or inaccurate.	Not consistent with the design. Inadequate information. Not fit for purpose.
Construction Details	Clear graphics and annotation with comprehensive dimensions. Sound construction. Suitable materials. Fit for purpose.	Incomplete or ambiguous graphics, annotation and/or dimensions. Unsuitable, ill-considered or inappropriate details.	Unsound construction. Inaccuracy, ambiguity or lack of clarity such that the element could not be constructed from the drawing(s). Not fit for purpose.
Specification & other Contract Documentation for works on site	Comprehensive and detailed enough for tendering purposes. Fully cross-referenced to construction details, construction layout plan(s) etc.	Some elements of the design missing or ambiguous. Repetition between the specification/scope of works and drawings that could lead to confusion or legal complications.	Not consistent with construction details and/or other elements of the design.

	Accept	Refer	Not to Required Standard
CDM Risk Assessment (Project 3 only)	CDM documentation completed relevant to project. Mitigates existing and project risks.	CDM documentation completed but does not identify adequately the main risks associated with the project.	CDM documentation not present or incomplete.
Management and Development Plan, with Sustainability Statement (Project 3 only)	Clear communication of intent. Comprehensive and detailed description of tasks to be undertaken. Feasible in terms of accessibility. Feasible in terms of availability and/or skill, and of budget.	Lack of clarity in communication of intent. Lack of clarity in description of some tasks. Lack of feasibility in some respects.	Not feasible. Not consistent with the design and/or brief. Not appropriate for the design and/or brief.
Photographic Record	Complete and clear set of the required photographs.	Incomplete or unclear set of the required photographs.	Photographs show none of the required views.