

WHAT IS NHSS18?

Jodie Reed explains the integrated management scheme, one of a series of National Highways Sector Schemes that is tailored for hazardous works on highways, where operatives are in close proximity to fast-moving traffic.

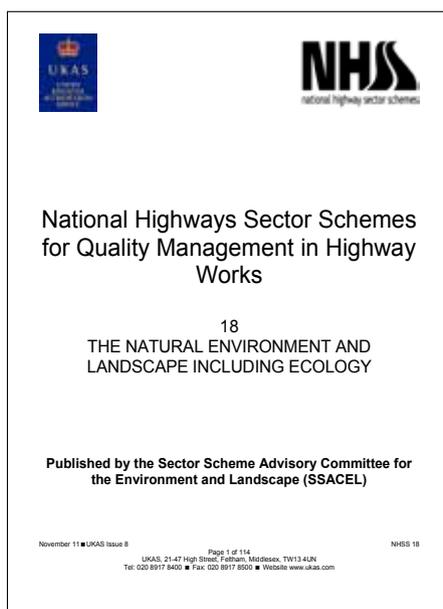
In the last edition, we explained what ROLO is, and the fact that it's a prerequisite for the National Highways Sector Scheme 18 for the Environment and Landscape including ecology (NHSS18). But what is NHSS18?

NHSS18 is a bespoke integrated management scheme, based on the framework of the Quality Management Standard ISO9001:2008. It is one of a series of National Highways Sector Schemes, tailored for highway works, which are recognised as being hazardous owing to the fast-moving traffic flowing in close proximity to operatives.

NHSS18 itself is the scheme which is most likely to apply to landscapers, as it has been published by a specialist Sector Scheme Advisory Committee for the Environment and Landscape (SSACEL) and applies to a range of activities that include:

- Weed control
- Control of rabbits and deer
- Application and management of pesticides
- Ground preparation
- Grass and wildflower seeding and turfing
- Planting
- Grass, bulbs and wildflower maintenance
- Watering
- Establishment maintenance for planting
- Arboricultural activities
- Maintenance of established trees and shrubs
- Mechanical tree and vegetation removal

For a full list of categories, see the latest version of NHSS18, which can be downloaded at <http://ukas.com/Technical-Information/Publications-and-Tech-Articles/Publications/PubsForCBAccred.asp>.



DO WE NEED NHSS18?

The Highways Agency states that "any supplier of services covered by NHSS and working on Highways Agency roads is required to be registered to the relevant scheme(s)" and goes so far as to state that this is a mandatory requirement unless otherwise specified in contract documents.

Under the scheme, subcontractors are not permitted to provide services under the umbrella of another registered supplier, and most therefore hold their own certification. So, if your company is providing (or wishes to provide) landscaping services to the highways infrastructure, then "yes", you will need to achieve NHSS18 (reference: <http://www.highways.gov.uk/business/10937.htm>).



HOW DO WE GET NHSS18?

If you already have certification for management systems such as ISO9001 (Quality), ISO14001 (Environment) and OHSAS18001 (Health and Safety) then you are probably most of the way there. An easy, and often cost-effective way to find out where the gaps lie may be to commission a Gap Analysis from experienced consultants. This will enable you to decide whether you have the internal skills and resources to address any gaps, and allows you to budget for any extra work. Note that not all Certification Bodies are approved to assess against NHSS. Details on how to check whether your certification body can carry out the extra assessment for NHSS18 are given in Appendix F of the standard.

If you don't already have a management system in place, you'll need to implement one and have it formally assessed by an approved Certification Body. The British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) can provide further information about the standard and consultants that can provide assistance in meeting the requirements. Visit: http://www.bali.org.uk/quality_assurance/nhss18.

HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER MY SUBCONTRACTORS HAVE NHSS18?

Details of any organisation that have achieved NHSS18 (or any other Sector Scheme) can be



accessed via the National Highways Schedule of Suppliers website, <http://www.scheduleofsuppliers.com/search.aspx>, so you can be sure that the contractors you are looking to appoint have the necessary certification in place – and of course, your potential clients will be able to check for your details too.

ABOUT JODIE READ



Jodie Read achieved a BSc in Biology and an MSc in Global Biodiversity; Monitoring and Conservation in the University of Hull. After leaving university she worked as a research worker for the Forestry Commission. In 2006, Jodie became Managing Director of what is now Penarth Management Ltd and assists organisations to implement and maintain management systems to recognised standards such as ISO9001 (Quality), ISO14001 (Environmental) and OHSAS18001 (Health and Safety). The team have assisted numerous landscaping organisations to successfully implement management systems to recognised standards and the company are affiliate members of the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI). She is also one of only a few approved ROLO health and safety trainers in the country.



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The elements of corporate social responsibility are continually developing, so the expectations placed upon an organisation change daily. Among all the legislative burden, Paul Elcoat looks at how to keep your business ahead of the game.

As promised at the end of my article in the last edition of ProLandscape I am going to focus on the key ingredients of competitive advantage and justify them in terms of their contribution to increased sales and profitability rather than the usual perspective of legal compliance and threat of enforcement.

With years of helping companies through the pre-qualification (PQQ) process we have continually monitored the development of the 'things that the procuring agencies' find important and attractive. I was going to write that we have

seen trends come and go but the reality is that new requirements come and then stay rather than go. This of course makes pre-qualification a long and complicated process of demonstration of legal compliance and possession of the 'correct' values and beliefs.

One way to look at this is that it's a pain, but another way is to give the whole concept your full support. The reality is that you cannot fight it; it is the way things are so you are either with it or you are embarking upon a path to your own decline.



While in Brasov, Romania, I was introduced to a woman working on a six-month placement to help raise funds at a hospice in the city. She explained that managers at her company do this as part of their development.

We know that the landscape and tree industries are mostly composed of people who love trees and horticulture but are reluctant or unable to enter the game. My opinion is unsympathetic in that while everyone else is protesting and keeping their fingers crossed for a reduction in the legislative burden, those of us who have recognised that there is a game to be played are romping ahead of the crowd. In fact I would suggest that there is no better place to do business than in an environment where most of the competition is apathetic and unable?

PRE-QUALIFICATION PROCESS

If there was a name for all of the stuff included within a PQQ it would be 'social responsibility', also commonly referred to as 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR).

ISO26000: 2010 (Guidance on Social

Responsibility) neatly lists the benefits in its introduction:

- Competitive advantage
- Reputation
- Ability to attract and retain workers and customers
- Morale, commitment and productivity
- Relationship with companies, government, media, suppliers and community

The elements of social responsibility continually develop and so the expectations placed upon an organisation are changing every day. Broadly, the key elements of social responsibility are:

- Good governance – accountability, transparency and probity (ethical behaviour).
- Respect for stakeholder interests (who are your neighbours and what do they need?)
- Respect for the rule of the law (health, safety, environmental, employment and so on).
- Respect for human rights (including equal opportunities and diversity).

It isn't difficult to make this pay and first you must commit to it, because if you just play around it will be a cost rather than a benefit. Second, you must be able to demonstrate that you have everything taken care of by being able to produce records that meet the expectations of potential clients. Third, your support must be overt by achieving appropriate third-party certification (SSIP, ISO's etc). With these three elements in place, you will be swimming in a much smaller

pond, you will find the PQQ process easy and, especially if you are a smaller contractor with relatively low overheads, you will win contracts.

Let me tell you about how one well-known company impressed me by being socially responsible.

CSR IN ACTION

I spent some time in Brasov in Romania in 2010 providing consultancy to a couple of NGOs as part of our social responsibility strategy. While visiting a hospice in the city I was introduced to a manager employed by a leading pharmaceutical/healthcare company. She was working on a six-month placement in the hospice to help raise funds and she explained that managers of her company do this as part of their development.

The hospice benefits from the time of a qualified professional manager, the sponsor company achieves positive publicity, and after six months the manager returns to the company with significant sharp-end experience; it's a win-win-win.

What a forward-thinking organisation it must be and if it is operating initiatives such as this, imagine how good it must be at the other things that it does? On my return to the UK I bought shares in the company – probably worth a punt!

ABOUT PAUL ELCOAT



Paul Elcoat is the founder of Elcoat Limited based in South Northamptonshire and works as an advisor to many companies in the landscape and tree

industries. Since 2005 he has specialised in helping small contractors to get everything in place to increase sales and win contracts. He started his career in amenity horticulture and developed an interest in trees. He has been a climbing arborist, NPTC Assessor and Verifier and up until the establishment of his own company he was a director for a large vegetation management contractor serving the domestic, highway and railway sectors. With an MBA, qualifications in health and safety and as a Chartered Environmentalist, he has the rare ability to turn corporate responsibility into increased revenue. Paul would be happy to take questions or comments from readers by email: paul@pauelcoat.co.uk or telephone 020 7193 5611 / 07800 615 900.