Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS) Specification

The ALS is run by the HCV Network Secretariat with oversight from HCV Network Members. The ALS was created in 2014 to improve the competency of HCV assessors and the quality of assessment reports for high-risk scenarios by:

1. Issuing licenses to qualified assessors to lead HCV and/or HCV-HCSA assessments.
2. Providing assessment manuals, guidance and reporting templates;
3. Evaluating HCV or HCV-HCSA\(^1\) assessment reports produced by licensed assessors; and
4. Engaging in regular communication with assessors.

This is tied to the objective of the HCV Network to ensure the consistent use of the HCV Approach and to contribute to the conservation of environmental and social values in commodity production settings. By improving HCV and HCV-HCSA assessments, the ALS helps to ensure that values are properly identified and subsequently conserved or maintained in the long term.

Who makes up the ALS?

The ALS is composed of several groups of participants, each with specific roles. Applicants, licensed assessors, quality panel (QP) members, training organisations and HCVN Assurance staff are all expected to follow the ALS Terms and Conditions.

Applicants

Prospective assessors and QP members are required to submit an online application to participate in the ALS. Applications are reviewed by the HCV Network Secretariat, and only those that meet the application requirements will be considered. Prospective QP members must be approved by the HCV

\(^1\) HCV-HCSA assessment report evaluation started after the publication of the HCV-HCSA assessment manual in November 2017.
Network Deputy Director, Assurance. For prospective assessors, an **application fee** (USD $575) is charged to cover the costs of processing each application.

**Licensed assessors**

There are two categories of licensed assessors, both can lead HCV or HCV-HCSA assessments:

- **Provisionally licensed assessors**: These are assessors who have the relevant qualifications and experience, but whose reports have not yet been evaluated by ALS. To obtain a full licence, provisionally licensed assessors have **three attempts** to submit **two satisfactory** assessment reports within two years of receiving a provisional licence. If the assessor fails to do so, the licence is cancelled. If this occurs, the assessor may reapply to the ALS.

- **Fully licensed assessors**: These assessors have achieved satisfactory reports. All reports submitted by fully licensed assessors must be satisfactory. Unsatisfactory reports will result in licence cancellation.

- Assessors must be active, so they are up to date on assessment requirements and guidance. Assessor’s inactivity results in licence cancellation. If this occurs, the assessor may reapply to the ALS. Assessors remain **active** by doing the following at least every two years:
  - submitting at least one satisfactory report
  Or
  - passing a paid refresher training with the HCV Network Secretariat
  Or
  - Imparting a Licensed Assessor training via a Registered Training Provider,

- Licensed assessors, of both categories, must **renew** their licence every year by paying an **annual renewal fee** (USD $300).
• If re-applying for a licence takes place after more than one year of cancellation or after guidance has been updated, then the assessor must pay the full application fee (USD $575). Otherwise, s/he/they can pay the renewal fee ($300).

• Licensed assessors are required to **submit all** their HCV and HCV-HCSA assessment reports for evaluation, regardless of the context in which these assessments took place. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in licence cancellation. Licensed assessors must abide by the Assessor Terms and Conditions (which applies to applicants and licensed assessors) and the licensed assessor Code of Conduct.

**HCVN Assurance Staff**

The HCVN Assurance staff is composed of an Assurance Deputy Director, Technical, Quality Manager and other quality assurance officers, with input from other Secretariat staff. The HCV Network Secretariat oversees the HCVN ALS with support from other Secretariat staff and HCV Network Members. The main responsibilities of the HCVN ALS staff are to manage report evaluations conducted by the QP, conduct Initial Checks, process applications, keep ALS Controlled Documents up to date, organise webinars and other communication and learning activities with ALS participants, liaise with training providers and issue training certificates; engage with end-users of the quality assurance services (voluntary sustainability standards and approaches, organisations commissioning assessments), and with members of the public, etc.

**Quality Panel**

Assessment report evaluations are conducted by a Quality Panel (QP) formed by at least one external expert and one internal expert (Secretariat staff) who follow ALS report evaluation procedures based on reference documents (e.g., HCV Common Guidance, HCSA Toolkit, assessment manuals and report templates). The QP is coordinated by the Quality Manager. All external QP members are subject to a trial period and their performance is evaluated annually. QP members must abide by the Quality Panel Terms and Conditions and the Quality Panel Code of Conduct. The Quality Panel members are
publicly listed, and they are assigned to cases based on their expertise and after verifying they have no Conflict of Interest with the case. Names of QP members involved in specific report evaluations are kept confidential to avoid undue pressure.

When QP members do not reach consensus or there is unresolved disagreement between the QP members regarding report evaluation results (including marking and requirements), the HCVN Assurance staff, based on experience and knowledge, is responsible for making a final decision regarding the requirements and marking of the report.

**Registered training providers**

Registered training providers impart **Training Courses** following the relevant course syllabus and coordination agreements. Training providers are required to register with the HCV Network Secretariat and abide by the training provider Terms and Conditions. A list of registered training providers and past and upcoming courses can be found online.

**Organisations commissioning assessments**

Though the organisations that commission HCV or HCV-HCSA assessments are not formally part of the ALS, they are important participants in the overall system. Organisations need to be aware of how the ALS works and to stay updated about the ALS requirements. They can also actively follow the status of report evaluations as they proceed through the ALS. The ALS actively communicates with these organisations throughout the report evaluation process.

**Standard report evaluations**

There is a standard report evaluation system for HCV and HCV-HCSA assessment reports that covers one main development area or area of interest. This is summarised below:

When a report evaluation begins, its status is publicly posted on the ALS website so that people can check on the progress of the report moving through the system. The report evaluation process is based on a thorough reading of the report package (assessment report and supporting materials)
by two or more experts (including QP member and HCVN Assurance staff).
During the evaluation, QP members mark each section as satisfactory or unsatisfactory – based on the relevant reference documents (e.g., HCV Common Guidance, HCSA Toolkit, ALS manuals and templates).

If at any stage of a report evaluation the HCVN Secretariat has a reasonable concern that the Quality Panel feedback has not addressed the report's weaknesses and this may lead to HCVs (and/or HCS Forest, peat or people's lands) being threatened or at risk, the HCVN Secretariat may request an additional independent evaluation of the assessment report. The cost of this additional evaluation would be covered by the HCVN Secretariat and would act as the final decision for the report outcome.

The ALS has a set of Key Issues (see relevant manual for details), which are those report sections or topics that are fundamental to producing a good quality report that adheres to the HCV Approach and/or HCV and HCS Approaches. The assessor must achieve a satisfactory marking for all Key Issues to pass with an overall satisfactory marking, i.e., if any one Key Issue is unsatisfactory, the overall report marking is unsatisfactory. The assessor has three attempts to attain a satisfactory outcome for each report.

Assessors may appeal a report evaluation outcome that is unsatisfactory via the Appeals Procedure.

**ALS Appeal Procedure**

Licensed assessors who disagree with QP feedback on Key Issues can submit an appeal. All appeals must be submitted within 30 working days of receiving QP feedback. If the assessor does not appeal, it is assumed the QP feedback has been accepted. All appeals must be settled before report resubmission. The cost of a rejected appeal will be invoiced to the assessor. For more details, see the procedure.
STANDARD REPORT EVALUATION PROCESS

Assessor uploads report package* and pays evaluation fee

QP Evaluation: Is report satisfactory, i.e. are all key issues satisfactory?

No**  Yes

Assessor amends documents, re-submits & pays fee

QP Evaluation: Is report satisfactory, i.e. are all key issues satisfactory?

No***  Yes

Assessor amends documents, re-submits & pays fee

QP Evaluation: Is report satisfactory, i.e. are all key issues satisfactory?

No**  Yes

Report is unsatisfactory

Report package is published on ALS website

Up to 55 calendar days for HCV reports and up to 75 days for HCV-HCSA reports

1st Re-submission: 30 calendar days**

Up to 40 calendar days for HCV reports and up to 50 days for HCV-HCSA reports

2nd Re-submission: 30 calendar days*

Up to 40 calendar days for HCV reports and up to 50 days for HCV-HCSA reports

Publication: 1 day

* Redactions before publishing may be requested (additional redacted version required).
** Assessors may extend this to a total of 60 calendar days. Further extensions have penalties.
*** Assessors can appeal an unsatisfactory Evaluation outcome via the ALS Appeals Procedure (rejected appeals come at a cost).

NOTE: Additional resubmissions (at a cost) may be allowed if the outstanding requirements are “minor” (do not affect designation values or delineation of conservation areas). Minor resubmissions may take up to a week (for the assessor) and two weeks (for the QP evaluation).

hcvnetwork.org
Combined assessment report evaluations

The ALS is running a pilot procedure to evaluate combined assessment reports – combining results from more than one development area and/or area of interest into one report (See procedure on website). The fees and timeline are different for combined reports.
COMBINED REPORT EVALUATION PROCESS

Assessor uploads report package* and pays evaluation fee

QP Evaluation: Is report satisfactory, i.e. are all key issues satisfactory?
No** Yes

Assessor amends documents, re-submits & pays fee

QP Evaluation: Is report satisfactory, i.e. are all key issues satisfactory?
No*** Yes

Assessor amends documents, re-submits & pays fee

QP Evaluation: Is report satisfactory, i.e. are all key issues satisfactory?
No** Yes

Report is unsatisfactory Report package is published on ALS website

Up to 75 calendar days for HCV reports and up to 100 days for HCV-HCSA reports

1st Re-submission: 30 calendar days**

Up to 50 calendar days for HCV reports and up to 70 days for HCV-HCSA reports

2nd Re-submission: 30 calendar days *

Up to 50 calendar days for HCV reports and up to 70 days for HCV-HCSA reports

Publication: 1 day

* Redactions before publishing may be requested (additional redacted version required).
** Assessors may extend this to a total of 60 calendar days. Further extensions have penalties.
*** Assessors can appeal an unsatisfactory Evaluation outcome via the ALS Appeals Procedure (rejected appeals come at a cost).
NOTE: Additional resubmissions (at a cost) may be allowed if the outstanding requirements are “minor” (do not affect designation values or delineation of conservation areas). Minor resubmissions may take up to a week (for the assessor) and two weeks (for the QP evaluation).

hcvnetwork.org
Report Evaluation

1. **Submission**: Licensed assessor uploads the report package (assessment report and supporting materials, including the Sworn declaration). On the report cover page, the assessor must include information on the contact person from the organisation commissioning the assessment. The assessor and the organisation commissioning the assessment must decide whether the report can be published in full or if there is sensitive information that must be redacted, in which case a justification must be provided. At this time the organisation’s contact person is informed that the report has been received, the fee the assessor has paid and that the report package is beginning the ALS evaluation process.

2. The Quality Manager assigns the case to a QP member and HCVN Assurance staff, who begin the **evaluation** following ALS procedures and guidelines. The evaluation results in a feedback document. The feedback document includes satisfactory or unsatisfactory markings for each report section or topic. Non-Key Issues may have comments and unsatisfactory Key Issues will have both comments and requirements (mandatory changes needed before report resubmission can take place). At this time the organisation commissioning the assessment is informed of the report status. Assessors may appeal the result and if the appeal is accepted (fully or partially), feedback will be updated to reflect this.

3. **First re-submission**: If the report evaluation outcome was unsatisfactory (i.e., one or more unsatisfactory Key Issues were found), the licensed assessor can make corrections and re-submit the report. The QP and HCVN Assurance staff will then verify if the assessor made all the **required changes**. This step results in an updated feedback document. At this time the organisation commissioning the assessment is informed of the report status.

4. **Second re-submission**: If after the first re-submission the report outcome is still unsatisfactory (i.e., one or more unsatisfactory Key
Issues has not been corrected), the licensed assessor is given one last opportunity to make corrections and resubmit the report. The final evaluation will verify if the licensed assessor made the remaining required changes. This step results in a final feedback document. At this time the organisation commissioning the assessment is informed of the report status.

5. If the final report outcome is satisfactory, the report is published online. If the final report outcome is unsatisfactory, assessors may appeal the result by following the Appeals Procedure. To change an unsatisfactory marking for a report, all outstanding requirements would have to be successfully challenged in the appeal. If the final report outcome is unsatisfactory, the report will not be published online. At this time the organisation commissioning the assessment is informed of the report status.

Report evaluation fees and timeframes

Licensed assessors pay a report evaluation fee whenever they submit or resubmit reports, which they are advised to recover from the organisation who commissioned the assessment.

Submission fees are detailed in the table below.

Report resubmission fees are “adaptive”, based on the estimated level of effort (LoE) needed to review the resubmission. Adaptive fees apply to all resubmissions regardless of the level of outstanding requirements (major or minor) and are non-negotiable. One free revision is provided if the outstanding issues are minor and can be processed by HCVN Assurance staff in one hour or less.

Adaptive fees will increase in line with the LoE, whenever assessors make changes other than those required; such changes must be informed to the Quality Manager in advance, so the adaptive fee is updated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report category</th>
<th>Evaluation Fee</th>
<th>Time frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard HCV report</td>
<td><strong>Submission: $5,225</strong></td>
<td>Up to 55 days for first round evaluation and up to 40 days for resubmissions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For <strong>resubmissions</strong>, an adaptive resubmission fee based on the estimated level of effort (LoE) needed to review the resubmission will apply.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined HCV report: multiple</td>
<td><strong>Submission: $7,535</strong></td>
<td>Up to 75 days for first round evaluation and up to 50 days for resubmissions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development areas</td>
<td>For <strong>resubmissions</strong>, an adaptive resubmission fee based on the estimated level of effort (LoE) needed to review the resubmission will apply.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard HCV-HCSA report</td>
<td><strong>Submission: $7,535</strong></td>
<td>Up to 75 days for first round evaluation and up to 50 days for resubmissions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For <strong>resubmissions</strong>, an adaptive resubmission fee based on the estimated level of effort (LoE) needed to review the resubmission will apply.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined HCV-HCSA report: multiple</td>
<td><strong>Submission: $9,825</strong></td>
<td>Up to 100 days for first round evaluation and up to 70 days for resubmissions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development areas</td>
<td>For <strong>resubmissions</strong>, an adaptive resubmission fee based on the estimated level of effort (LoE) needed to review the resubmission will apply</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These timeframes exclude the period from the last working day before 24th December and the first working day after 3rd January.

**Penalties for delayed report evaluations**

In the case of report evaluation delays caused by the HCVN, the HCVN will compensate time in the next stage of evaluation, provided that the delay is informed to the assessor no later than the date stipulated to submit results. Extraordinary situations causing delays (force majeure such as QP member illness) are not the HCVN Secretariat responsibility.
Penalties for delayed report resubmissions

Assessors are expected to complete their report resubmissions in up to 60 days. Delayed report resubmissions are allowed when the assessor provides a justification. Unjustified delays lead to the evaluation process being cancelled (no fees re-imbursed).

Delayed resubmissions are more time consuming since require reorganising the workload and the Quality Panel may need to re-read the entire report package to review the resubmission.

All justified delayed resubmissions\(^2\) will pay a 250US$ penalty on top of the resubmission fee, for every 30 days added to the allowed 60-day assessor review period (up to the value of the submission fee).

Checking on the status of standard report evaluations

On the website under “Find Reports” – interested parties can check on the status of report evaluations. Note: Companies will be informed by email about report evaluation status on a regular basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Track</td>
<td>When a report evaluation is within target timeframes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
<td>When an assessor decides to discontinue the report evaluation. In these cases, the ALS will not reimburse evaluation fees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(\textit{Note: Report withdrawals do not have an impact on the assessor’s licence status.})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealed</td>
<td>When an assessor does not agree with the report evaluation result (see table above) and submits an appeal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancelled</td>
<td>When an assessor is unresponsive to emails or fails to meet target timeframes. In these cases, the ALS will not reimburse the evaluation fees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) This applies to adaptive fees resubmissions and to long-delayed resubmissions where fees were set based on a percentage of the submission fee.
When a report is cancelled by the ALS, the same assessor or another assessor may submit the report as a new case.

Note: Report cancellations do not have an impact on the Assessor’s licence.

Delayed
When the ALS team (including external Quality Panel members) does not meet target timeframes, the report will appear on the public dashboard as ‘Delayed’. When this occurs, a new estimated timeframe will be communicated to the assessor and company.

Optional Initial Check
The Initial Check (IC) is an optional service provided by the ALS and it costs USD $575 for HCV assessment reports and USD $880 for HCV-HCSA assessment reports. The IC is independent of the ALS report evaluation process; it identifies if an HCV or HCV-HCSA assessment report is weak in ALS Key Issues or if it does not comply with the required report template. The IC aims to reduce the likelihood of unsatisfactory reports. The IC does not check the report annexes. The IC is not a full, in-depth evaluation of the assessment report, it is a one-off check resulting in the Initial Check Feedback which lists all changes recommended in the Key Issues sections of the assessment report or regarding structure. The checklist used by HCVN Assurance staff when performing an IC is available online.

Complaints & Internal Investigations
A Complaints Procedure is available online for any stakeholder to use. The HCV Network Members can conduct internal investigations to address potential non-compliances by ALS participants; these are led by the HCV Network Secretariat. More information is available on the HCVN website.

Communications
The ALS communicates with licensed assessors, Quality Panel members, companies, and other stakeholders on a regular basis. There is a bi-monthly ALS email newsletter and periodic webinars are held on topics of interest. The HCV Network welcomes feedback via an online form on the website.
Languages

The ALS can evaluate reports in five languages: Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Most ALS documents are available in these five languages.