

Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS) Specification

The ALS is run by the HCV Network Secretariat with oversight from the HCV Network Management Committee. The ALS was created in 2014 to improve the competency of HCV assessors and the quality of assessment reports by:

1. Issuing licences to qualified assessors to lead HCV and/or HCV-HCSA assessments;
2. Providing assessment manuals, guidance and reporting templates;
3. Evaluating HCV or HCV-HCSA¹ assessment reports produced by licensed assessors; and
4. Engaging in regular communication with assessors through webinars, newsletters, calls and WhatsApp groups.

This is tied to the larger 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 ALS 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. [Application Guidelines](#) are available online. Applications are reviewed by the ALS Quality Manager, and only those that meet the application requirements will be considered. Prospective QP members must be approved by the HCV Network Management Committee. For prospective assessors, an **application fee** (USD \$500) 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 who have not yet been “tested” by the system (i.e. their 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 “proven themselves” by producing satisfactory reports. All reports submitted by fully Licensed Assessors must be satisfactory. Unsatisfactory reports will result in licence cancellation. Fully Licensed Assessors must remain **active** by submitting at least one satisfactory report every two years. Inactivity will result in licence cancellation. If this occurs, the assessor may reapply to the ALS.

¹ HCV-HCSA assessment report evaluation started after the publication of the HCV-HCSA assessment manual in November 2017.

- Licensed Assessors, of both categories, must **renew** their licence every year by paying an **annual renewal fee** (USD \$250).

Licensed Assessors are required to **submit all** their 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.

ALS Staff

The ALS staff is composed of a Quality Manager and other quality assurance officers, with input from other Secretariat staff. The Quality Manager is part of the HCV Network Secretariat. The Quality Manager oversees the ALS with support from other Secretariat staff and the HCV Network Management Committee. The main responsibilities of the Quality Manager and the ALS staff are to manage report evaluations conducted by the QP, conduct Initial Checks, process applications, organise webinars and other communication with ALS participants, liaise with training providers and issue training certificates, etc.

Quality Panel

Assessment report evaluations are conducted by a Quality Panel (QP) formed by at least one independent 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.

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 ALS Quality Manager 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

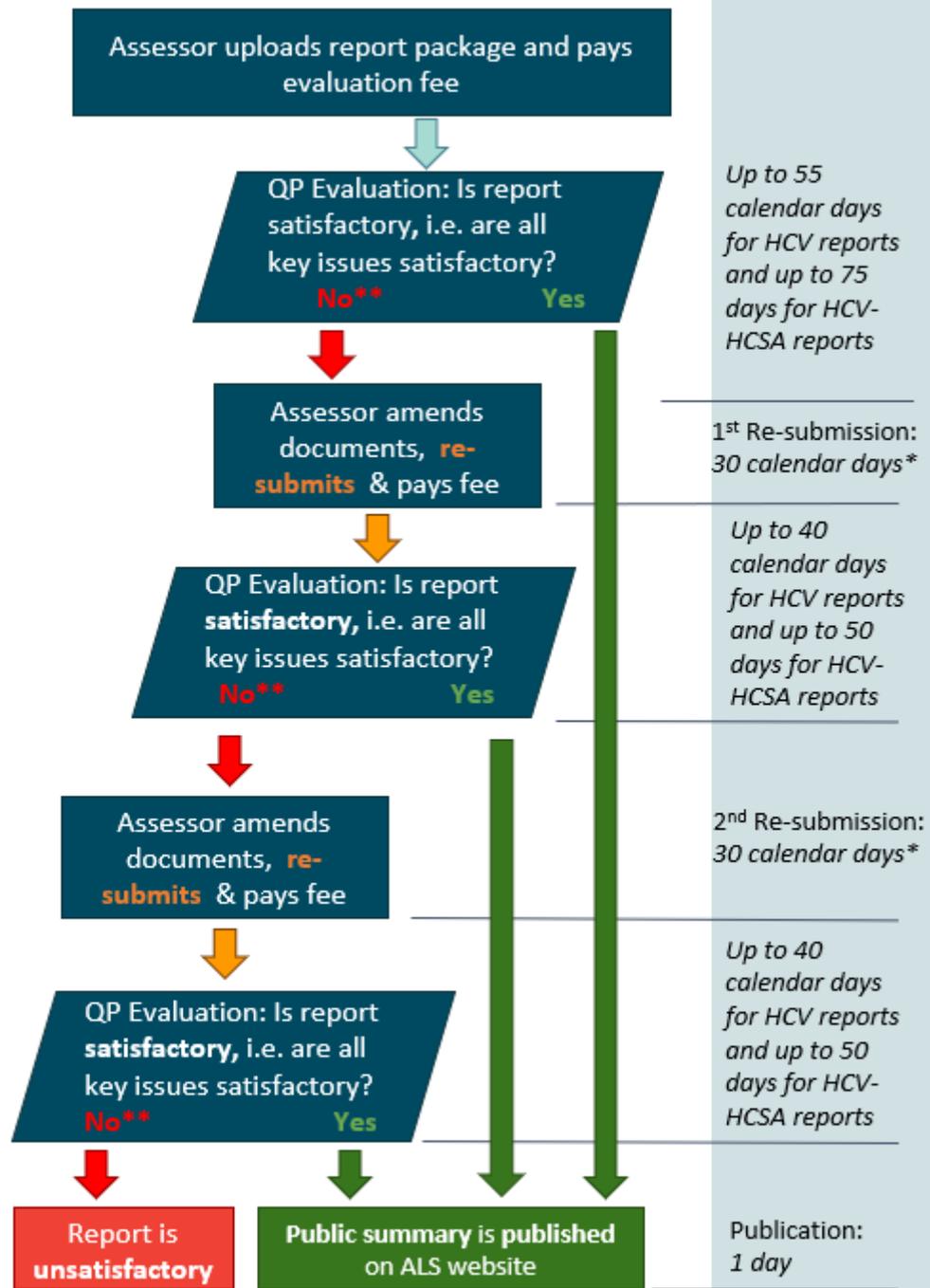
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thorough reading of the report package (main report, public summary and supporting materials) by two or more experts (including QP member and ALS staff). During the evaluation, QP members mark each section as satisfactory or unsatisfactory – based 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 HCVRN 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 HCVRN Secretariat may request an additional independent evaluation of the assessment report. The cost of this additional evaluation would be covered by the HCVRN Secretariat and would act as the final decision for the report outcome.

The ALS has a set of Key Issues (see relevant report templates 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 (see figure below). Resubmissions cost 50% of the cost of the first submission (e.g. if the first submission cost USD \$4,500, all subsequent resubmissions of that report would cost USD \$2,250). Assessors may appeal a report evaluation outcome that is unsatisfactory via the Appeals Procedure.

REPORT EVALUATION PROCESS



* Assessors may extend this phase to a total of 60 calendar days

** For each QP Evaluation outcome that is unsatisfactory, the assessor can appeal the report outcome via the ALS Appeals Procedure

Report Evaluation

1. **Submission:** Licensed Assessor uploads the report package (assessment report, public summary and supporting materials) and pays a report evaluation fee. On the report cover page, the Assessor must include information on the contact person from the organisation commissioning the assessment. 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 ALS 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 ALS 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 public summary of the report is published online. If the final report outcome is unsatisfactory, assessors may appeal the final result by following the Appeals Procedure. To change a final 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 public summary will not be published online. At this time the organisation commissioning the assessment is informed of the report status.

Appeals Procedure

Licensed assessors who need clarification or disagree with QP feedback on Key Issues can submit an appeal, following the appeal procedure. All appeals must be submitted within 30 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 resubmission. For more details, see the website.

Combined assessment report evaluations

In 2020 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. Resubmissions for combined reports will cost 75% of the original evaluation fee.

Report evaluation fees and timelines

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.

Report category	Evaluation Fee	Time frame
Standard HCV report	<p>\$3,645 - \$4,500</p> <p><u>Fees for Provisionally Licensed Assessors</u></p> <p>\$4,500 - First report submitted to ALS</p> <p>\$4,050 - Assessor has delivered at least one unsatisfactory report (final marking)</p> <p>\$3,645 - All the assessors' reports have been satisfactory (on final marking)</p> <p><u>Fees for Fully Licensed Assessors</u></p> <p>\$3,645 - First report submitted as a Fully Licensed Assessor or if previous report submitted as Fully Licensed Assessor had no resubmissions</p> <p>\$4,050 - If last report required one resubmission</p> <p>\$4,500 - If last report required two resubmissions</p>	Up to 55 days for first round evaluation and up to 40 days for resubmissions.
Combined HCV report: multiple development areas with overlapping AOIs	\$6,500	Up to 75 days for first round evaluation and up to 50 days for resubmissions.
Standard HCV-HCSA report	\$6,500	Up to 75 days for first round evaluation and up to 50 days for resubmissions.
Combined HCV-HCSA report: multiple development areas with overlapping AOIs	\$8,500	Up to 100 days for first round evaluation and up to 70 days for resubmissions.

Checking on the status of standard report evaluations

On the website under “Find Report Evaluation” – 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.

Category	Description
On Track	When a report evaluation is within target timeframes.
Withdrawn	When an assessor decides to discontinue the report evaluation. In these cases, the ALS will not reimburse evaluation fees. <i>Note: Report withdrawals do not have an impact on the assessor’s licence status.</i>
Appealed	When an assessor does not agree with the report evaluation result (see table above) and submits an appeal.
Cancelled	When an assessor is unresponsive to emails or fails to meet target timeframes. In these cases, the ALS will not reimburse the evaluation fees. When a report is cancelled by the ALS, the same assessor or another assessor may submit the report as a <u>new case</u> . <i>Note: Report cancellations do not have an impact on the assessor’s licence.</i>
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 \$500 for HCV assessment reports** and **USD \$750 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 public summary or 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 ALS 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 Management Committee can conduct internal investigations to address potential non-compliances by ALS participants; these are led by the ALS Quality Manager. More information is available on the website Library section.

Communications

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