

History of changes to the Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS)

The Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS) was launched in November 2014. Since that time, the scheme has undergone periodic reviews. This document summarises important changes to the ALS over time.

We recognise that the format and length of this document can be improved. However, we have opted to publish this information now – with the intention to make this more user-friendly for future updates.

If you have any comments or questions, please email jimena@hcvnetwork.org

2020

Topic	Old procedure or situation	New procedure or change	Rationale and process
Working Groups		A working group was started for Licensed Assessors and Quality Panel members. Start Date: March 2020	Results from a survey of Licensed Assessors in February 2020 showed that there was interest in a forum for communication, exchange and in becoming more actively engaged in updates to ALS procedures and guidance.
QP procedure to evaluate assessment reports	The procedure and checklist needed updating to match updated 2017 (HCV-HCSA) and 2019 (HCV) manuals.	A new general guidance for QP evaluation of assessment reports is relevant for HCV and HCV-HCSA reports, includes explanation on minor changes and internal quality panel members, among other updates Valid from: 18 November 2020	Valid for HCV assessment reports following 2019 manual and HCV-HCSA assessments following 2017 manual.
Appeals	Appeal form was offline.	Appeal form is online and updated appeal procedure gives assessors more time to submit appeal. Valid from: 20 July 2020	Assessors requested more time to submit an appeal. Online form facilitates submission of appeals.
Disputes/complaints	Previously called the Dispute Resolution Procedure – this was updated and renamed.	A complaint procedure was developed Valid from: 29 April 2020	This procedure is available when someone wishes to raise a complaint (i.e. to express their disagreement) about something related to the HCVN ALS.



Timeline for evaluation of HCV-HCSA assessment reports	The timeline for evaluation of HCV-HCSA assessment reports was set based on the timeline for HCV report evaluations. However, after processing more than 20 HCV-HCSA reports, experience showed that these reports require more time to be evaluated.	Timeline for the evaluation of HCV-HCSA assessment reports is: Up to 75 days for evaluation of submission Up to 50 days for evaluation of any resubmission Valid from: 22 January 2020	To allow organisations commissioning assessments and their associates (e.g. scheme smallholders) to better plan and to avoid being affected in their development plan by delays in report evaluation. To ensure the ALS team sets achievable targets which reflect the complexity and amount of information evaluated in this type of reports. All assessors were informed via email sent on 22 January 2020.
Internal Investigations	Procedure referred to HCV assessments only.	Internal investigations procedure updated to refer to HCV-HCSA assessments Valid from: 14 January 2020	

2019

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Combined Assessment Procedure	Reports containing assessment results for multiple development areas or areas of interest (AOI) were submitted for evaluation in a single report. This caused reports to be longer and more complicated and often lacked all required information because of the maximum size of a report set for a single site type of report.	A pilot Combined Assessment Procedure was launched providing the criteria for submitting reports that combine information about multiple non-contiguous development areas. The procedure includes the evaluation fee and longer time frame for this type of evaluation. An online survey is available to help determine whether a report can be submitted according to the combined assessment procedure. Valid from: 27 December 2019	Report evaluation fees are based on the time and cost needed to evaluate a report of an assessment conducted at a single AOI. Assessments of non-contiguous sites differs from single site/contiguous sites assessments and report evaluation may take longer. The procedure was developed following consultation with assessors and HCVN Management Committee and approved by HCVN MC.



		<p>When the new procedure was launched, assessors were asked to register on-going (initiated before 27 December 2019) assessments involving multiple non-contiguous development areas and/or multiple AOIs.</p> <p>These registered reports will be evaluated according to the time frames published in the Combined Assessment Procedure.</p> <p>Valid from: 27 November 2019</p>	<p>These reports are not subject to the fees and template for Combined Assessment reports, since the assessments were initiated before the procedure was launched. However, the timeline for their evaluation will be longer than that of a report with a single AOI or development area. The fees that apply for combined assessment are not applied retrospectively.</p>
<p>HCVN Website and ALS platform</p>	<p>'Find Report Evaluation' page displayed date of submission/resubmission.</p>	<p>Page improved to display :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - report evaluation status when the report is with the ALS (i.e. On track, Withdrawn, Appealed, Cancelled, Delayed) - The dates of paid submissions/resubmissions - The dates when results for paid submissions/resubmissions are sent - Final report result with date of publication and HCVs, HCV area / HCV management area identified <p>The website allows searching and filtering reports by status, assessors, regions and other filters.</p> <p>Valid from: 17 Dec 2019</p>	<p>Improve transparency based on feedback from organisations commissioning assessments and other stakeholders.</p> <p>This adjustment follows recommendations by end users (palm oil growers and the RSPO Board of Governors), following a period where delays in evaluations were frequent and there was not sufficient information about who had the responsibility to move the evaluation process forward (ALS or the assessor).</p> <p>Assessors were informed 12 December 2018, with offline transition and going live once they all had access in January 2019.</p>



	<p>The website was technically and visually outdated and did not integrate with the CRM¹ system, requiring several steps of manually updating information and transferring data. The CRM system was not set up to process reports and could not accommodate integrated HCV-HCSA assessment reports with their increased requirements regarding quality assurance.</p>	<p>By updating the web platform and the platform used to process report evaluations, these issues were addressed, replacing the CRM platform with a Salesforce based customized ALS Community automatically synchronized with the new website. The Salesforce ALS Community allows HCVN ALS staff to manage assessors and quality panel applications, as well as report evaluations. Licensed Assessors and Quality Panel members use the ALS Community to upload reports, receive and respond to the feedback, while the Quality panel can process their assignments and consolidate feedback online. respond to the feedback.</p> <p>Valid from: 1 November 2018</p> <p>There is a new website and a new Salesforce-based ALS Community to conduct evaluations. Evaluations are conducted online for 2019 HCV Assessment Manual reports and HCV-HCSA assessment reports.</p> <p>Valid from: 1 November 2019</p>	<p>ALS Community User Guide and HCVN ALS Admin Guide procedures are created to guide users on the new website. This will improve platform and user experience, and help handle a larger influx of reports more efficiently. Assessors were informed 12 December 2018, with offline transition and going live once they all had access in January 2019.</p>
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¹ Customer Relationship Management



HCV Assessment Manual updates	<p>The HCV Assessment Manual was launched in 2014 and had not been updated since.</p> <p>HCV assessment report limit was 45 pages (excluding cover page, tables of contents, maps, figures and tables, reference list and annexes).</p>	<p>HCV assessments underway at the time of publication of the 2019 HCV Assessment Manual, may still be written up using the old manual and reporting templates until 1 August 2019. From this date, all HCV assessment reports must be submitted to ALS following the new manual and templates.</p> <p>Cut off date: 1 August 2019</p>	<p>There were several HCV assessments underway at various stages of progress at the time of publication of the 2019 manual, so a cut off date was set to submit assessments using 2014 manual and templates.</p> <p>Informed to all assessors in Webinars held on 7 May 2019.</p>
		<p>Updated 2019 manual includes the following important changes:</p> <p><u>Key Issues:</u> Previous key issues were reorganised, and two new key issues were introduced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Cover classification • Boundaries of the AOI <p>Valid from: 20 March 2019</p>	<p>Draft manual was shared in October 2018 for comments.</p> <p>It incorporates feedback from users to restructure contents and harmonises with HCV-HCSA assessment report templates).</p>
Public Summary	<p>The Public Summary was submitted with the full report at the start of the report evaluation process. The Quality Panel would evaluate the full report and public summary. Whenever changes were required in the full report, the Public Summary needed to be revised. This was an unnecessary step that</p>	<p>Assessors submit the Public Summary once all other Key Issue sections are Satisfactory. The final report evaluation outcome will be published once the Public Summary is satisfactory.</p> <p>Valid from: 31 January 2019</p>	<p>This adjustment follows feedback from licensed assessors and Quality Panel members to reduce number of revisions.</p> <p>Informed to all assessors via email sent on 31 January 2021.</p>



	would add time to the report evaluation timeline.		
<p>Page number limit</p>	<p>HCV Assessment report limit was 45 pages (excluding cover page, tables of contents, maps, figures and tables, reference list and annexes).</p>	<p>Page limits increased and to be enforced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HCV-HCSA: 75 pages (excluding maps, figures and annexes) - HCV: 65 pages (excluding maps, figures and annexes) <p>Reports exceeding the allowed length will not be accepted for evaluation (i.e. will not be published on the website and will not be assigned to the Quality Panel).</p> <p>Valid from: 31 January 2019</p>	<p>Page number increase based on feedback from assessors that 45 pages (for HCV reports) is not enough and reflecting the need to include information on two new key issues.</p> <p>The reason for enforcing maximum length of reports is that the report evaluation fees (and those paid to the Quality Panel) are designed based on the time needed to read through and comment on a given size of report. Reports beyond the maximum length take more time and cost more than the paid fee.</p> <p>Informed to all assessors via email sent on 31 January 2021.</p>



Topic	Old procedure or situation	New procedure or change	Rationale and process
Report resubmission deadlines	<p>Once the Assessor informs the ALS of his/her intention to resubmit, the assessor has 30 days to resubmit the report. However, in practice some assessors exceeded the 30-day period. Previously, the ALS granted unlimited extensions when Licensed Assessors requested more time for the resubmission.</p>	<p>Once the Assessor informs the ALS of his/her intention to resubmit, the assessor has 30 days to resubmit the report. Extensions will be granted (up to a total of 60 calendar days per report resubmission). Granting of extensions will be communicated to the Organisation commissioning the assessment.</p> <p>Valid from: 14 November 2018 (informed via mail in same date)</p>	<p>Based on 2018 experiences with a backlog in report evaluations, and with feedback from the RSPO Board of Governors, the HCVN Management Committee approved changes to reduce the duration of report evaluations and avoid reports staying in the HCVN ALS system indefinitely. This change (among others, see below) acknowledges that long HCV assessment report evaluations have important negative impacts on growers and the RSPO.</p>
Report Withdrawals	<p>There was no option to withdraw a report submitted for evaluation.</p>	<p>Assessors may discontinue a report evaluation by communicating their decision to the ALS Quality Manager in written. In these cases, the ALS will not reimburse the evaluation fee. The assessor must copy their clients' representative when communicating the report withdrawal. Report withdrawals will not have an impact on the assessor's licence status.</p> <p>Valid from: 14 November 2018 (informed via mail in same date)</p>	<p>Based on 2018 experiences with a backlog in report evaluations, and with feedback from the RSPO Board of Governors, the HCVN Management Committee approved changes to reduce the duration of report evaluations and avoid reports staying in the HCVN ALS system indefinitely. This change (among others, see below) acknowledges that long HCV assessment report evaluations have important negative impacts on growers and the RSPO.</p>



Report cancellations:	<p>There was no option to cancel an evaluation.</p>	<p>ALS will cancel a report evaluation when an assessor is unresponsive to emails or fails to meet target timeframes (the ones set above). 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 new case. Report cancellations will not have an impact on the assessor's licence status. The ALS will copy the assessor's client representative when communicating the report cancellation.</p> <p>Valid from: 14 November 2018 (informed via mail in same date)</p>	<p>Based on 2018 experiences with a backlog in report evaluations, and with feedback from the RSPO Board of Governors, the HCVN Management Committee approved changes to reduce the duration of report evaluations and avoid reports staying in the HCVN ALS system indefinitely. This change (among others, see below) acknowledges that long HCV assessment report evaluations have important negative impacts on growers and the RSPO.</p>
Initial Check (IC)	<p>The Initial Check (IC) step was introduced in 2017 as an optional, free of charge service which was part of the formal report evaluation process (see Nov 2017 table below).</p>	<p>The Initial Check (IC) service will continue to be optional but will be separate from the formal report evaluation process and will have a cost.</p> <p>Valid from: 1st September 2018</p>	<p>Licensed assessors claim ICs are useful, however this step uses ALS resources (time and money), and is a source of delay in the report evaluation process. Charging IC fees will guarantee covering ALS staff time in ICs.</p>
Translation of public summary	<p>In 2017 we introduced a requirement that translations of public summaries must be done by someone on the ALS translator list.</p>	<p>We will no longer require that translators come only from the list on the ALS website. Assessors are responsible for choosing and commissioning the translations.</p> <p>Valid from: 28 August 2018</p>	<p>In practice, this list was a potential help and hindrance to assessors. Translators on the list might not always be available, and there could be good translators who were not on the list. Shared in webinars with assessors on 16, 21 and 27 August 2018</p>
Expert registry	<p>Expert registry was a way to connect people interested in gaining HCV assessment experience with Licensed Assessors who could potentially invite them to join assessment teams.</p>	<p>The Expert Registry has been phased out, but we have invited experts to apply to the QP if they are interested and qualified.</p> <p>Valid from: 6 August 2018</p>	<p>There was no evidence that Licensed Assessors hired any of the experts from the registry.</p>



Application to the Quality Panel	<p>Invitation Only for QP application</p> <p>Previously, Quality Panel applications were by invitation only. From 1 July 2017 an application procedure was made available for qualified professionals to apply to the Quality Panel.</p>	<p>Open Application for Quality panel</p> <p><u>Quality Panel application guidelines</u> have been updated to allow more professionals to apply to the ALS. We welcome experts with qualifications and experience in relevant fields) to act as secondary reviewers working alongside a primary reviewer with strong HCV experience..</p> <p>Valid from: 6 August 2018</p>	<p>To enhance the wider pool of available report evaluations</p> <p>A larger QP should mean there is a wider pool of available report evaluators when reports come in – thus helping to speed up report evaluations. Some application requirements were restrictive and disincentivized applications to the QP.</p>
Direct communication with Organisations commissioning assessments	<p>Organisations commissioning assessments had access to limited information about progress of assessment report evaluations. The information is available on the ALS website, but people may not be aware of that and therefore may not track report progress.</p>	<p>Organisations will receive email updates at each stage of the report evaluation process. More information will also be provided online.</p> <p>Valid from: 19 June 2018</p>	<p>Organisations can now be better informed about the report evaluation process.</p> <p>Informed to all assessors in August 18th, webinar.</p>
Report evaluation process	<p>Quality Panel members were external.</p>	<p>For each report evaluation, one Quality Panel member will continue to be external, but the other(s) may be internal (i.e. HCVRN Secretariat staff).</p> <p>Valid from: 19 June 2018</p>	<p>Report evaluation delays were often caused by over-reliance on external QP members (contractors who may not always be available). ALS staff are involved in all cases to ensure consistency and quality of QP evaluations. The new system allows for this to happen more efficiently.</p> <p>Informed to all assessors in August 18th, webinar.</p>



2016-2017

In 2016 Licensed Assessors and other stakeholders were involved in an ALS review and were consulted on proposed changes prior to implementation. Changes were communicated to Licensed Assessors and RSPO-member growers through a series of webinars delivered in Bahasa Indonesia, Spanish and English.



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Quality assurance of HCV-HCSA assessments	The HCV-HCSA Assessment Manual was published in November 2017 and any new HCV-HCSA assessments started after that date are evaluated by the ALS.		
HCV Assessor Training Course quality	Previously, the ALS did not check the content of training courses delivered by ALS-registered training organisations.	The ALS will now pre-approve training course content in advance of each individual training course to ensure consistency with the ALS training syllabus. Valid from: 1 October 2017	
Report submission requirements	Previously, only HCV assessment reports for which assessors claimed to be ALS-licensed had to be submitted to the ALS for evaluation.	All HCV assessment reports produced by Licensed Assessors must now be submitted to the ALS for evaluation. Non-compliance with this rule will result in licence cancellation. Valid from: 4 August 2017	
Language of public summary	Previously, public summaries were required to be submitted in English.	Public summaries are now required in English and in the original language of the report. Translations must be done by ALS translators (note this has since changed in 2018), who must use the ALS glossary. The cost of translation must be paid for by the Assessor. Valid from: 4 August 2017	



<p>Scoping study</p>	<p>A scoping study was previously required if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project was categorised as Tier 1; or <p>If the project was categorised as Tier 2 but the assessor was unfamiliar with the project site and did not have contacts for forming the full assessment team, and/or there was very little information available about the site in terms of maps, reports and studies and a field visit was therefore necessary.</p>	<p>A scoping study is always required.</p> <p>Valid from: 4 August 2017</p>	
<p>Key issues</p>	<p>Previously there were nine Key Issues that had to be satisfactory for an HCV assessment report to pass:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> HCV 1 HCV 2 HCV 3 HCV 4 HCV 5 HCV 6 Stakeholder consultations HCV maps and HCV management area maps <p>Quality of public summary</p>	<p>There are now eleven Key Issues that must be satisfactory for the HCV assessment report to pass:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> HCV 1 HCV 2 HCV 3 HCV 4 HCV 5 HCV 6 Stakeholder consultations HCV maps and HCV management area maps Quality of public summary Methods Management and Monitoring Recommendations <p>Valid from: 4 August 2017</p>	
<p>ALS disputes</p>	<p>Previously, a summary of ongoing ALS disputes was only shared with stakeholders upon request.</p>	<p>A summary of ongoing ALS disputes is now publicly available on the HCVN website.</p> <p>Valid from: 4 August 2017</p>	



Pre-registration of assessments	N/A	<p>Now, all HCV assessments should be pre-registered on the ALS website. Note, this requirement has since changed.</p> <p>Valid from: 4 August 2017</p>	
Points-based rewards for licensed assessors	N/A	<p>Assessors may now collect performance-based points and redeem them against report evaluation and licence renewal fees.</p> <p>Valid from: 01 July 2017</p>	
Application to the Quality Panel	<p>Previously, Quality Panel applications were by invitation only.</p>	<p>An application procedure is now available for qualified professionals to apply to the Quality Panel.</p> <p>Valid from: 1 July 2017</p> <p>Note: application guidelines updated 6 August 2018</p>	



<p>Tier rating</p>	<p>HCV assessments were previously classified as Tier 1 or Tier 2, depending on their risk level. The report evaluation fee was set according to the Tier rating.</p>	<p>Tiers are no longer used to define report evaluation fees. Evaluation fees are now determined by an assessor's performance.</p> <p>Fees for provisionally Licensed Assessors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US \$4,500 for the first report submission; • US \$4,050 if the Assessor's previously submitted report was unsatisfactory; • US \$3,645 if the Assessor's previously-submitted report was satisfactory. <p>Fees for fully Licensed Assessors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US \$3,645 for the first report submitted as a fully Licensed Assessor or if the previous report as a fully Licensed Assessor had no re-submissions • US \$4,050 if the last report required one re-submission • US \$4,500 if the last report required two re-submissions <p>Valid from: 14 July 2017</p>	
<p>Peer reviews</p>	<p>Previously, a peer review was required when an HCV assessment was classified as Tier 1. ALS Quality Panel report evaluations began after the peer review had been conducted (when applicable).</p>	<p>Peer reviews are no longer required for any HCV assessments. Peer reviews were conducted externally of the ALS and it was difficult to ensure consistency. Now instead of peer reviews, the Quality Panel evaluates the technical content of assessment reports.</p> <p>Valid from: 14 July 2017</p>	



<p>Initial Check</p>	<p>Initial checks are part of the evaluation. However, in some cases, reports were of poor quality and could not be evaluated in the time available for the QP.</p>	<p>An Initial Check will now take place before a report is sent to the Quality Panel. This step will identify if a report and/or public summary are weak on any ALS Key Issues.</p> <p>Valid from: 14 July 2017 – Note this has since changed in 2018</p>	
<p>Resubmissions</p>	<p>Previously, if a report was found to be unsatisfactory, one re-submission was allowed (free of cost).</p>	<p>If a report is found to be unsatisfactory, two re-submissions will now be allowed (at a cost).</p> <p>Valid from: 14 July 2017</p>	



<p>Report evaluation fees</p>	<p>There was a standard report evaluation fee as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approx. US \$2,000 for a peer review (when required); • US \$2,000 for a Tier 1 report evaluation; • US \$900 for a Tier 2 report evaluation. <p>From 2014 to 2016, the average total cost of a report evaluation (comprising a peer review and a Quality Panel evaluation) was US \$4,000.</p>	<p>New fees are based on the assessor's licence type and previous performance.</p> <p>Fees for provisionally Licensed Assessors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US \$4,500 for the first report submission; • US \$4,050 if the Assessor's previously submitted report was unsatisfactory; • US \$3,645 if the Assessor's previously-submitted report was satisfactory. <p>Fees for fully Licensed Assessors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US \$3,645 for the first report submitted as a fully Licensed Assessor or if the previous report as a fully Licensed Assessor had no re-submissions • US \$4,050 if the last report required one re-submission • US \$4,500 if the last report required two re-submissions <p>If an Assessor submits more than one report at once, the same fee applies to all.</p> <p>Valid from: 14 July 2017</p>	
<p>Templates</p>	<p>Previously, PDF templates for HCV assessment reports and public summaries were available.</p>	<p>PDF templates will be substituted with new, editable Word templates, use of which will be mandatory. The report and public summary page limits will increase slightly.</p> <p>Valid from: 30 days from publication of the templates.</p>	



Internal investigations	N/A	<p>The HCV Network (HCVN) Management Committee may commission internal investigations to verify if ALS participants are complying with the ALS Terms and Conditions and its rules and procedures.</p> <p>Valid from: 15 June 2017</p>	
Appeals	<p>There was no appeal procedure to contest the ALS Quality Panel feedback.</p>	<p>A procedure and template to be used by Licensed Assessors whose assessment report evaluation result is 'unsatisfactory', to contest or request clarifications about the report evaluation result.</p>	
Licence validity	<p>Licensed Assessors previously had 3 years to submit at least one satisfactory report for a licence to remain active. If a satisfactory report was not submitted, the licence would be deactivated. If a licence was deactivated, the Licensed Assessor had to re-apply to the ALS for a new licence.</p>	<p>Licensed Assessors will now have 2 years to submit at least one satisfactory report for a licence to remain active. If a satisfactory report is not submitted, the licence will be deactivated. If a licence is deactivated the person will have to re-apply to the ALS.</p> <p>Valid for: All Licensed Assessors granted a provisional license from 1 January 2017.</p>	<p>A large number of provisionally licensed assessors were not submitting reports for evaluation (inactive).</p>



<p>Obtaining a provisional licence</p>	<p>Applicant required relevant training and/or experience including as team member or leader in at least two HCV assessments.</p>	<p>Applicant requires relevant training and/or experience including as team member or leader in at least two HCV assessments or 1 HCV assessment and 1 other assessment (e.g. FSC controlled wood, IFC). ALS Lead Assessor training course (by registered training organisation) is required.</p>	<p>Allowing experience in other types of assessments increases the number of potential applicants. Required training aims to increase the familiarity of the applicants with the ALS requirements. In 2016 Licensed Assessors and other stakeholders were involved in an ALS review and were consulted on proposed changes prior to implementation. Changes were communicated to Licensed Assessors and RSPO-member growers through a series of webinars delivered in Bahasa Indonesia, Spanish and English.</p>
<p>Obtaining a full licence</p>	<p>To obtain a full licence, provisionally-Licensed Assessors previously had three attempts to submit two satisfactory HCV assessment reports. These reports needed to be submitted within 3 years of receiving a provisional licence.</p>	<p>To obtain a full licence, provisionally-Licensed Assessors still have three attempts to submit two satisfactory HCV assessment reports, but these reports now need to be submitted within 2 years of receiving a provisional licence.</p> <p>Valid for: All Licensed Assessors granted a provisional license from 1 January 2017</p>	<p>A large number of provisionally licensed assessors were not submitting reports for evaluation (inactive).</p>