

A CREDITORS' GUIDE
TO LIQUIDATORS FEES
(SCOTLAND)

1. Introduction

1.1 When a company goes into liquidation the costs of the proceedings are paid out of its assets in priority to creditors' claims. The creditors, who hope to recover some of their debts out of the assets, therefore have a direct interest in the level of costs, and in particular the remuneration of the insolvency practitioner appointed to act as liquidator. The insolvency legislation recognises this interest by providing mechanisms for creditors to fix the basis of the liquidator's fees. This guide is intended to help creditors be aware of their rights to approve and monitor fees, and explains the basis on which fees are fixed.

2. Liquidation Procedure

2.1 Liquidation (or "winding up") is the most common type of corporate insolvency procedure. Liquidation is the formal winding up of a company's affairs entailing the realisation of its assets and the distribution of the proceeds in a prescribed order of priority. Liquidation may be either voluntary, when it is instituted by resolution of the shareholders, or court, when it is instituted by order of the court.

2.2 Voluntary and court liquidation are equally common. An insolvent voluntary liquidation is called a creditors' voluntary liquidation (often abbreviated to "CVL"). In this type of liquidation an insolvency practitioner acts as liquidator throughout and the creditors can vote on the appointment of the liquidator at the first meeting of creditors.

2.3 In a court liquidation an insolvency practitioner may be appointed to act as provisional liquidator until the making of the winding up order. In all court liquidations, an insolvency practitioner is appointed to act as interim liquidator from the making of the winding up order until the first meeting in the liquidation, and the creditors can vote on the appointment of the liquidator at the first meeting of creditors.

2.4 Where a court liquidation follows immediately on an administration the court may appoint the former administrator to act as liquidator.

3. The Liquidation Committee

3.1 In a liquidation (whether voluntary or court) the creditors have the right to appoint a committee called the liquidation committee, with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 members to monitor the conduct of the liquidation and approve the liquidation the liquidator's fees. The committee is usually established at the creditors' meeting which appoints the liquidator, but in cases where a liquidation follows immediately on from an administration any committee established for the purposes of the administration will continue in being as the liquidation committee.

3.2 The liquidator must call the first meeting of the committee within 3 months of its establishment (or his appointment if that is later), and subsequent meetings must be held either at specified dates agreed by the committee, or when requested by a member of the committee, or when the liquidator decides he needs to hold one. The liquidator is required to report to the committee at least every 6 months on the progress of the liquidation. This provides the opportunity for the committee to monitor and discuss the progress of the insolvency and the level of the liquidator's fees.

4. Fixing the Liquidator's Fees

4.1 The basis for fixing the liquidator's (which includes an interim liquidator's) remuneration is set out in Rule 4.32 of the Insolvency (Scotland) Rules 1986, and in Section 53 of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 which is applied to liquidations by Rule 4.68. These Rules state that the remuneration may be a commission calculated by reference to the value of the assets which are realised but there shall in any event be taken into account the work which, having regard to that value, was reasonably undertaken, and the extent of the responsibilities in administering the estate.

4.2 It is for the liquidation committee (if there is one) to fix the remuneration. If there is no liquidation committee, or the committee does not make the requisite determination, the liquidator's remuneration is fixed by the court.

4.3 Rule 4.5 lays down that the remuneration of a provisional liquidator can only be fixed by the court.

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5 What Information should be Provided by the Liquidator?

5.1 When seeking agreement to his fees the liquidator should provide sufficient supporting information to enable the committee or the court to form a judgment as to whether the proposed fee is reasonable having regard to all the circumstances of the case. The liquidator should always make available an up to date receipts and payments account. Where the fee is to be charged on a time basis the liquidator should be prepared to disclose the amount of time spent on the case and the charge-out value of the time spent, together with such additional information as may reasonably be required having regard to the size and complexity of the case. Where the fee is charged on a percentage basis, the liquidator should provide details of any work which has been or is intended to be contracted out which would normally be undertaken directly by a liquidator or his staff.

5.2 Where a liquidator makes, or proposes to make, a separate charge by way of expenses and disbursements to recover the cost of facilities provided by his own firm, he should disclose those charges to the committee or the creditors when seeking approval of his fees together with an explanation of how those charges are made up and the basis on which they are arrived at.

5.3 In Rule 4.12 of the Insolvency (Scotland) Rules 1986, a resolution may be passed fixing the basis of fees at first meeting of creditors in a court liquidation. The liquidator should immediately notify the creditors of the details of the resolution, and when subsequently reporting to creditors on the progress of the liquidation, or submitting his final report, he should specify the amount of remuneration he has drawn in accordance with the resolution. Where the fee is based on the time costs he also should provide details of the time spent and charge-out value to date and any material changes in the rates charged since the resolution was first passed. Where the fee is charged on a percentage basis the liquidator should provide the details set out in paragraph 5.1 above regarding work which has been sub-contracted out.

5.4 Paragraph 5.3 above does not however apply to a voluntary liquidation.

6. What if a Creditor is Dissatisfied?

6.1 If a creditor believes that the liquidator's remuneration is too high he may, under Rule 4.35, apply to the court for an order that it be reduced. If the court considers the application to be well-founded, it shall make an order fixing the remuneration at a reduced amount or rate. Unless the court orders otherwise, the expenses of the application shall be paid by the applicant, and are not payable as an expense of the liquidation.

7. What if the Liquidator is Dissatisfied?

7.1 If the liquidator considers that the remuneration fixed by the committee is insufficient he may request that it be increased by resolution of the creditors. He may also request that court for an order increasing its amount or rate, before or after recourse to the creditors. If he decides to apply to the court he must give at least 14 days' notice to the members of the committee and the committee may nominate one or more of its members to appear or be represented at the court hearing. If there is no committee, the liquidator's notice of his application must be sent to such of the creditors as the court may direct, and they may nominate one or more of their number to appear or be represented. The court may, if it appears to be a proper case, order the costs to be paid out of the assets of the company.

8. Other Matters Relating to Fees

8.1 Where the liquidator realises assets on behalf of a secured creditor, he will usually agree the basis of his fee for dealing with charged assets with the secured creditor concerned.

8.2 Where two (or more) joint liquidators are appointed it is for them to agree between themselves how the remuneration payable should be apportioned. Any dispute between them may be referred to the court, the committee or a meeting of creditors.

8.3 There may also be occasions when creditors will agree to make funds available themselves to pay for the liquidator to carry out tasks which cannot be paid for out of the assets, either because they are deficient or because it is uncertain whether the work undertaken will result in any benefit to creditors. Arrangements of this kind are sometimes made to fund litigation or investigations into the affairs of the insolvent company. Any arrangements of this nature will be a matter for agreement between the liquidator and the creditors concerned and will not be subject to the statutory rules relating to remuneration.