A CREDITORS' GUIDE TO LIQUIDATORS' FEES

ENGLAND AND WALES

1. Introduction

1.1 When a company goes into liquidation the costs of the proceedings are paid out of its assets. 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 compulsory, when it is instituted by order of the court.

2.2 Voluntary liquidation is the more common of the two. 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 compulsory liquidation on the other hand, the function of liquidator is, in most cases, initially performed not by an insolvency practitioner, but by an official called the official receiver. The official receiver is an officer of the court and a member of The Insolvency Service, an executive agency within the Department of Trade and Industry. In most compulsory liquidations the official receiver becomes liquidator immediately on the making of the winding-up order. Where there are significant assets an insolvency practitioner will usually be appointed to act as liquidator in place of the official receiver, either at a meeting of creditors convened for the purpose or directly by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Where an insolvency practitioner is not appointed the official receiver remains liquidator.

2.4 Where a compulsory liquidation follows immediately on an administration the court may appoint the former administrator to act as liquidator. In such cases the official receiver does not become liquidator. An administrator may also subsequently act as liquidator in a CVL.

3. The liquidation committee

3.1 In a liquidation (whether voluntary or compulsory) 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 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 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 subsequently 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, unless the committee directs otherwise. This provides an 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 remuneration is set out in Rules 4.127 – 4.127B of the Insolvency Rules 1986. The Rules state that the remuneration shall be fixed either:

- as a percentage of the value of the assets which are realised or distributed or both, or
- by reference to the time properly given by the liquidator and his staff in attending to matters arising in the liquidation.

It is for the liquidation committee (if there is one) to determine on which of these basis the remuneration is to be fixed, and if it is to be fixed as a percentage, to fix the percentage to be applied. Rule 4.127 says that in arriving at its decision the committee shall have regard to the following matters:

- the complexity (or otherwise) of the case;
- any responsibility of an exceptional kind or degree which falls on the liquidator in connection with the insolvency;
- the effectiveness with which the liquidator appears to be carrying out, or to have carried out, his duties;
- the value and nature of the assets which the liquidator has to deal with.

4.2 If there is no liquidation committee, or the committee does not make the requisite determination, the liquidator's remuneration may be fixed by a resolution of a meeting of creditors. The creditors take account of the same matters as the committee would. A resolution specifying the terms on which the liquidator is to be remunerated may be taken at the meeting which appoints the liquidator. If the remuneration is not fixed in any of these ways, it will be in accordance with a scale set out in the Rules.

4.3 Staff are currently charged out at an hourly rate, details of which are as follows:-

	(per hour) **£**
IP/Office Holder	201
Manager	120-155
Administrator	60-100
Support	50-60

5. **What information should be provided by the liquidator?**

5.1 **When seeking fee approval**

5.1.1 When seeking agreement to his fees the liquidator should provide sufficient supporting information to enable the committee or the creditors to form a judgement as to whether the proposed fee is reasonable having regard to all the circumstances of the case. The nature and extent of the supporting information which should be provided will depend on:

- the nature of the approval being sought;
- the stage during the administration of the case at which it is being sought; and
- the size and complexity of the case.

5.1.2 Where, at any creditors' or committee meeting, the liquidator seeks agreement to the terms on which he is to be remunerated, he should provide the meeting with details of the charge-out rates of all grades of staff, including principals, which are likely to be involved on the case.

5.1.3 Where the liquidator seeks agreement to his fees during the course of the liquidation, he should always provide an up to date receipts and payments account. Where the proposed fee is based on time costs the liquidator should disclose to the committee, or the creditors the time spent and the charge-out value in the particular case, together with, where appropriate, such additional

information as may reasonably be required having regard to the size and complexity of the case. The additional information should comprise a sufficient explanation of what the liquidator has achieved and how it was achieved to enable the value of the exercise to be assessed (whilst recognising that the liquidator must fulfil certain statutory obligations that might be seen to bring no added value for creditors) and to establish that the time has been properly spent on the case. That assessment will need to be made having regard to the time spent and the rates at which that time was charged, bearing in mind the factors set out in paragraph 4.1 above. To enable this assessment to be carried out it may be necessary for the liquidator to provide an analysis of the time spent on the case by type of activity and grade of staff. The degree of detail will depend on the circumstances of the case, but it will be helpful to be aware of the professional guidance which has been given to insolvency practitioners on this subject. The guidance suggests the following areas of activity as a basis for the analysis of time spent:

- Administration and planning
- Investigations
- Realisation of assets
- Trading
- Creditors
- Any other case-specific matters

The following categories are suggested as a basis for analysis by grade of staff:

- Partner
- Manager
- Other senior professionals
- Assistants and support staff

The explanation of what has been done can be expected to include an outline of the nature of the assignment and the liquidator's own initial assessment, including the anticipated return to creditors. To the extent applicable it should also explain:

- Any significant aspects of the case, particularly those that affect the amount of time spent.
- The reasons for subsequent changes in strategy.
- Any comments on any figures in the summary of time spent accompanying the request the liquidator wishes to make.
- The steps taken to establish the view of creditors, particularly in relation to agreeing the strategy for the assignment, budgeting, time recording, fee drawing or fee agreement.
- Any existing agreement about fees.
- Details of how other professionals, including subcontractors, were chosen, how they were contracted to be paid, and what steps have been taken to review their fees.

It should be borne in mind that the degree of analysis and form of presentation should be proportionate to the size and complexity of the case. In smaller cases not all categories of activity will always be relevant, whilst further analysis may be necessary in larger cases.

5.1.4 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 sub-contracted out which would normally be undertaken directly by a liquidator or his staff.

5.2 **After fee approval**

Where a resolution fixing the basis of fees is passed at any creditor' meeting held before he has substantially completed his functions, the liquidator should notify the creditors of the details of the resolution in his next report or circular to them. 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 time costs he should also provide details of the time spent and charge-out value to date and any material changes in the rates charged for the various grades since the resolution was first passed. He should also provide such additional information as may be required in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 5.1.3. Where the fee is charged on a percentage basis the

liquidator should provide the details set out in paragraph 5.1.4 above regarding work which has been sub-contracted out.

5.3 **Expenses and disbursements**

There is no statutory requirement for the committee or the creditors to approve the drawing of expenses or disbursements. However, professional guidance issued to insolvency practitioners requires that, where the liquidator proposes to recover costs which, whilst being in the nature of expenses or disbursements, may include an element of shared or allocated costs (such as room hire, document storage or communication facilities provided by the liquidator's own firm), they must be disclosed and be authorised by those responsible for approving his remuneration. Such expenses must be directly incurred on the case and subject to a reasonable method of calculation and allocation.

5.3.1 **Liquidator's Disbursements**

Certain costs may be incurred in relation to a case and in the first instance, paid by Royce Peeling Green Limited and then recharged to the case. The amount recharged is the exact amount incurred. Examples are Statutory Bonding, Statutory Advertising, Land Registry Searches, Insurance, Travel and Subsistence and Storage Costs.

The current level of costs recharged are detailed below:-

Room Hire	Nil *
Postage (Dependent on weight) Reporting to Creditors	Prevailing Postal Rates
Stationery (photocopying per sheet)	. 10p
Mileage (per mile)	. 40p
Storage of Archive Boxes (per month per box)	.28p
Destruction of Archive Boxes	£2.50
Company Searches	£4.00
Swear Fee	£7.00
Land Registry Searches	£2.00

*if meetings are not held at the offices of Royce Peeling Green Limited the actual charge of the Room Hire will be levied on the case.

5.4 **Realisation for secured creditors**

Where the liquidator realises an asset on behalf of a secured creditor and receives remuneration out of the proceeds (see paragraph 8.1 below), he should disclose the amount of that remuneration to the committee (if there is one), to any meeting of creditors convened for the purpose of determining his fees, and in any reports he sends to creditors.

5.5 **Reporting in compulsory liquidations**

It should be borne in mind that in compulsory liquidations there is no statutory requirement for the liquidator to report to creditors until the conclusion of the assignment. In most such cases, therefore, creditors will receive no information during the course of the liquidation unless they specifically request it.

6. **What if a creditor is dissatisfied?**

6.1 Except in cases where there is a liquidation committee it is the creditors as a body who have authority to approve the liquidator's fees. To enable them to carry out this function, they may require the liquidator to call a creditors' meeting. In order to do this at least ten per cent in value of the creditors must concur with the request, which must be made to the liquidator in writing.

6.2 If a creditor believes that the liquidator's remuneration is too high he may, if at least 25 per cent in value of the creditors (including himself) agree, apply to the court for an order that it be reduced. If

the court does not dismiss the application (which it may if it considers that insufficient cause is shown) the applicant must give the liquidator a copy of the application and supporting evidence at least 14 days before the hearing. Unless the court orders otherwise, the costs must be paid by the applicant and not out of the assets of the insolvent company.

7. **What if the liquidator is dissatisfied?**

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. If he considers that the remuneration fixed by the committee or the creditors or in accordance with the statutory scale is insufficient, he may apply to the court for it to be increased. 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, he 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 order the costs to be paid out of the assets.

8. **Other matters relating to fees**

8.1 Where the liquidator realises assets on behalf of a secured creditor he is entitled to be remunerated out of the proceeds of sale in accordance with the scale set out in the Rules. Usually, however, the liquidator will 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 If the appointed liquidator is a solicitor and employ his own firm to act in the insolvency, profit costs may not be paid unless authorised by the committee, the creditors or the court.

8.4 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 deficiency 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.

9. **Provision of information – additional requirements**

In any case where the liquidator is appointed on or after 1 April 2005 he must provide certain information about the time spent on the case, free of charge, upon request by any creditor, director or shareholder of the company.

The information which must be provided is –

- the total number of hours spent on the case by the liquidator or staff assigned to the case;
- for each grade of staff, the average hourly rate at which they are charged out;
- the number of hours spent by each grade of staff in the relevant period.

The period for which the information must be provided is the period from the appointment to the end of the most recent period of six months reckoned from the date of the liquidator's appointment, or where he has vacated office, the date that he vacated office.

The information must be provided within 28 days of receipt of the request by the liquidator, and requests must be made within two years from vacation of office.