



ASIC

Australian Securities & Investments Commission

## Insolvency information for directors, employees, creditors and shareholders

ASIC has 11 insolvency information sheets to assist you if you're affected by a company's insolvency and have little or no knowledge of what's involved.

These plain language information sheets give directors, employees, creditors and shareholders a basic understanding of the three most common company insolvency procedures—liquidation, voluntary administration and receivership. There is an information sheet on the independence of external administrators and one that explains the process for approving the fees of external administrators. A glossary of commonly used insolvency terms is also provided.

The Insolvency Practitioners Association (IPA), the leading professional organisation in Australia for insolvency practitioners, endorses these publications and encourages its members to make their availability known to affected people.

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### Getting copies of the information sheets

To get copies of the information sheets, visit ASIC's website at [www.asic.gov.au/insolvencyinfosheets](http://www.asic.gov.au/insolvencyinfosheets). The information sheets are also available from the IPA website at [www.ipaa.com.au](http://www.ipaa.com.au). The IPA website also contains the IPA's Code of Professional Practice for Insolvency Professionals, which applies to IPA members.

**Important note:** The information sheets contain a summary of basic information on the topic. It is not a substitute for legal advice. Some provisions of the law referred to may have important exceptions or qualifications. These documents may not contain all of the information about the law or the exceptions and qualifications that are relevant to your circumstances. You will need a qualified professional adviser to take into account your particular circumstances and to tell you how the law applies to you.

## Information sheet: Approving remuneration of an external administrator

If you are a creditor in a liquidation, voluntary administration or deed of company arrangement you may be asked to approve the external administrator's remuneration. An external administrator can be a liquidator, voluntary administrator or deed administrator. The process for approving the remuneration for each of these is the same.

This information sheet gives general information to help you understand the process of approving an external administrator's remuneration and your rights in this process. The following topics are covered in this information sheet:

- About external administrations
- External administrator's remuneration and costs
- Calculating remuneration
- Information you will receive
- Approving remuneration
- Who may approve remuneration
- Deciding if remuneration is reasonable
- What can you do if you decide the remuneration is unreasonable?
- Reimbursement of out of pocket costs
- Queries and complaints
- More information.

### About external administrations

If a company goes into liquidation, voluntary administration or enters into a deed of company arrangement, an independent person is appointed to oversee the administration. They are called an external administrator and include a liquidator, voluntary administrator and deed administrator, depending on the type of administration involved. In this information sheet they are simply referred to as an external administrator.

The duties of an external administrator are specified in legislation and they must adhere to certain standards while conducting the administration.

All external administrators are required by law to undertake certain tasks which may not benefit creditors directly (e.g. investigating whether any offences have been committed and reporting to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC)).

### External administrator's remuneration and costs

External administrators are entitled to be paid for the necessary work they properly perform in the administration.

An external administrator is entitled:

- to be paid reasonable remuneration, for the work they perform, once this remuneration has been approved,
- to be paid for internal disbursements they incur in performing their role (these costs do need approval), and
- to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket costs incurred in performing their role (these costs do not need approval).

Common internal disbursements are stationery, photocopying and telephone costs.

Commonly reimbursed out-of-pocket costs include:

- legal fees
- a valuer's, real administration agent's and auctioneer's fees
- postage costs
- retrieval costs for recovering the company's computer records, and
- storage costs for the company's books and records.

Creditors have a direct interest in the amount of an external administrator's remuneration and costs, as these will generally be paid from the administration before any payments are made to creditors.

Remuneration and internal disbursements must be approved in accordance with the Corporations Act and Insolvency Practice Rules (Corporations) before it can be paid.

If there is a shortfall between the external administrator's remuneration and the assets available from the administration, in certain circumstances the external administrator may arrange for a third party to pay the shortfall. As a creditor, you will be provided details of any such arrangement.

If there are not enough assets to pay the external administrator's remuneration and costs, and there is no third party payment arrangement, the external administrator remains unpaid.

## Calculating remuneration

An external administrator may calculate their remuneration using one (or a combination) of a number of methods, such as:

- on the basis of time spent working on the administration, according to hourly rates
- a quoted fixed fee, based on an estimate of the costs
- a percentage (usually of asset realisations), or
- a contingent basis on a particular outcome being achieved.

Charging on the basis of time spent is the most common method used. External administrators have a set of hourly rates that they will seek to charge. These rates are set to reflect the seniority, skills and experience of staff and, where applicable, the complexity and risks of the bankruptcy. They cover staff costs and overheads.

If remuneration is being charged on a time basis, the external administrator must keep time sheets noting the number of hours spent on the tasks performed.

Creditors have a right to question the external administrator about the remuneration and the rates to be charged. They also have a right to question the external administrator about the fee calculation method used and how the calculation was made. The external administrator must justify why the chosen fee calculation method is appropriate for the administration.

## Information you will receive

There are different types of remuneration reports that you may receive during the course of an external administration. The following table details the reports and when you might receive them.

Document	Information it contains	When you will receive it
Initial Remuneration Notice (IRN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A brief explanation of the types of methods that may be used to calculate fees.</li> <li>• The external administrator's chosen fee calculation method(s) and why it is appropriate.</li> <li>• Details of the external administrator's rates, including hourly rates if time spent basis is used.</li> <li>• An estimate of the external administrator's remuneration.</li> <li>• The method that will be used to calculate disbursements.</li> </ul>	<p>Voluntary Administration – with the notice of first meeting.</p> <p>Creditors' voluntary liquidation – within 10 business days of appointment.</p> <p>Court liquidation – within 20 business days of appointment.</p>
Remuneration Approval Report (RAR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A summary description of the major tasks performed, or likely to be performed.</li> <li>• The costs associated with each of those major tasks and the method of calculation.</li> <li>• The periods at which the external administrator proposes to withdraw funds from the administration for remuneration.</li> <li>• An estimated total amount, or range of total amounts, of the external administrator's remuneration.</li> <li>• An explanation of the likely impact of that remuneration on the dividends (if any) to creditors.</li> <li>• Where internal disbursements are being claimed, the external administrator will report to creditors on the amount and method of calculation of these disbursements.</li> </ul>	<p>Sent at the same time as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the notice to creditors of the meeting at which approval of remuneration will be sought; or</li> <li>• the notice to creditors of the proposal without a meeting by which approval of remuneration will be sought</li> </ul> <p>If approval of remuneration is not being sought, a RAR will not be provided.</p>

## Approving remuneration

The meeting of creditors (or committee of inspection) gives a chance for those participating to ask questions about the external administrator's remuneration. Fees are then approved by a vote of the creditors. Alternatively, the external administrator may seek approval of remuneration via a proposal without a meeting. Whichever method is used, the external administrator must provide the same report to creditors about their remuneration (Remuneration Approval Report).

Creditors may be asked to approve remuneration for work already performed and/or remuneration estimate for work not yet carried out. If the work is yet to be carried out, the external administrator must set a maximum limit (cap) on the future remuneration approval. For example, 'future remuneration is approved, calculated on hours worked at the rates charged (as set out in the provided rate scale) up to a cap of \$X'.

If the remuneration for work done then exceeds this figure, the external administrator will have to ask the creditors to approve a further amount of remuneration, after accounting for the amount already incurred.

If an external administrator can't get the creditors' approval, an application can be made to the Court to determine their remuneration.

When there are limited funds available in the administration, or the external administrator's remuneration is below a statutory threshold, an external administrator is entitled to draw a one-off amount of up to that threshold plus GST, without creditor approval. This amount is currently \$5,000 (indexed).

## Who may approve remuneration?

### Committee of inspection approval

A committee of inspection will generally only be established where there are a large number of creditors and/or complex matters which make having a committee desirable. Committee members are chosen by a vote of all creditors and work with the external administrator to represent the creditors' interests.

If there is a committee, the external administrator will ask it to approve the remuneration. A committee makes its decision by a majority in number of its members present in person at a meeting, but it can only vote if a majority of its members attend.

In approving the remuneration, it is important that committee members understand that they represent all the creditors, not just their own individual interests.

### Creditors' approval

Creditors approve remuneration by passing a resolution at a creditors' meeting. Creditors may vote according to their individual interests.

To approve an external administrator's remuneration, a resolution is put to the meeting to be decided on the voices or by a 'poll' (if requested by the external administrator or a person participating and entitled to vote at the meeting). A poll requires a count of each vote and its value to be taken and recorded for each creditor present and voting.

A proxy is a document whereby a creditor appoints someone else to represent them at a creditors' meeting and to vote on their behalf. A proxy can be either a general proxy or a special proxy. A general proxy allows the person holding the proxy to vote how they want on a resolution, while a special proxy directs the proxy holder to vote in a particular way.

A creditor will sometimes appoint the external administrator as a proxy to vote on the creditor's behalf. An external administrator is only able to vote on remuneration if they hold a special proxy.

There are provisions for a resolution to be passed by creditors without a meeting. This still requires a majority in value and number of creditors voting to vote in favour of the resolution. Creditors representing at least 25% in value of those responding to the external administrator's proposal can object to the proposal being resolved without a meeting of creditors.

## Deciding if remuneration is reasonable

If you are asked to approve an external administrator's remuneration, your task is to decide if the amount of remuneration is reasonable, given the work carried out in the administration and the results of that work.

You may find the following information from the external administrator useful in deciding if the remuneration claimed is reasonable:

- the method used to calculate remuneration
- the major tasks that have been performed, or are likely to be performed, for the remuneration
- the remuneration/estimated remuneration (as applicable) for each of the major tasks
- the size and complexity (or otherwise) of the administration
- the amount of remuneration (if any) that has previously been approved
- if the remuneration is calculated, in whole or in part, on a time basis:
  - the period over which the work was, or is likely to be performed
  - if the remuneration is for work that has already been carried out, the time spent by each level of staff on each of the major tasks
  - if the remuneration is for work that is yet to be carried out, whether the remuneration is capped.

ARITA's Code of Professional Practice ('the Code') outlines the steps external administrators should take to make sure they fulfil their responsibilities to creditors when asking creditors to approve remuneration, including when those creditors are acting in their capacity as committee members. The Code is available on the ARITA website at [www.arita.com.au](http://www.arita.com.au).

If you need more information about remuneration than is provided in the external administrator's report, you should let them know before the meeting at which remuneration will be voted on.

## What can you do if you think the remuneration is unreasonable?

If you think the remuneration being claimed is unreasonable, you should raise your concerns with the external administrator. It is your decision whether to vote in favour of, or against, a resolution to approve remuneration. You may also choose to not vote on the resolution (abstain).

You also have the power to put a resolution to the meeting. For example, you could put forward a resolution to change the way the external administrator charges for remuneration, or the periods at which the external administrator may withdraw funds. Any amending resolution must occur before the vote being taken on the resolution to approve remuneration. If the amended proposal is passed, the resolution is binding on the external administrator. However, such an amendment may result in the external administrator seeking to be replaced by another external administrator.

If the external administrator is seeking approval of remuneration via a resolution without a meeting and more than 25% in value of the creditors responding object using the form provided by the external administrator, the proposal will not pass. If the external administrator wants the proposal passed, a meeting will need to be convened and any creditor entitled to participate in the meeting has the right, before the vote is taken, to put a resolution to the meeting as mentioned above.



A creditor may apply to Court for a review of an external administrator's remuneration. Creditors also have the power to appoint, by resolution, a reviewing liquidator to review any remuneration approved within the six months and any disbursements incurred in the 12 months before the reviewing liquidator's appointment. The cost of a reviewing liquidator is paid from the assets of the external administration. An individual creditor may also appoint a reviewing liquidator with the external administrator's consent. An individual creditor seeking the appointment of a reviewing liquidator must pay the cost of the reviewing liquidator.

### Reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs

An external administrator should be very careful incurring costs that must be paid from the administration; as careful as if they were incurring the expenses on their own behalf. Their report on remuneration sent to creditors must also include information on the out-of-pocket costs of the administration (disbursements).

Where these out-of-pocket costs are internal disbursements paid to the external administrator's firm (for example photocopying and phone calls) the external administrator must request creditor approval of these amounts. The external administrator may also ask for approval of internal disbursements in advance. If they do so, they will set the rates for those disbursements and a cap on the maximum amount that can be drawn.

If you have questions about any of these costs, you should ask the external administrator and, if necessary, bring it up at a creditors' or committee meeting. If you are still concerned, you have the right to seek the appointment of a reviewing liquidator (refer above).

### Queries and complaints

You should first raise any queries or complaints with the external administrator or their firm.

If this fails to resolve your concerns, including any concerns about their conduct, you can lodge a complaint with ARITA at [www.arita.com.au](http://www.arita.com.au) or with ASIC at [www.asic.gov.au](http://www.asic.gov.au). ARITA is only able to deal with complaints in respect of their members.

### More information

The [ARITA website](http://www.arita.com.au) contains the ARITA Code of Professional Practice which is applicable to all its members. ARITA also provides general information to assist creditors at [www.arita.com.au/creditors](http://www.arita.com.au/creditors).

ASIC includes information on its website which may assist creditors. Go to [www.asic.gov.au](http://www.asic.gov.au) and search for 'insolvency information sheets'.

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# Creditor Information Sheet

## Offences, Recoverable Transactions and Insolvent Trading



### Offences

A summary of offences under the Corporations Act that may be identified by the administrator:

180	Failure by company officers to exercise a reasonable degree of care and diligence in the exercise of their powers and the discharge of their duties.
181	Failure to act in good faith.
182	Making improper use of their position as an officer or employee, to gain, directly or indirectly, an advantage.
183	Making improper use of information acquired by virtue of the officer's position.
184	Reckless or intentional dishonesty in failing to exercise duties in good faith for a proper purpose. Use of position or information dishonestly to gain advantage or cause detriment. This can be a criminal offence.
198G	Performing or exercising a function or power as an officer while a company is under administration.
206A	Contravening a court order against taking part in the management of a corporation.
206A, B	Taking part in the management of corporation while being an insolvent, for example, while bankrupt.
206A, B	Acting as a director or promoter or taking part in the management of a company within five years after conviction or imprisonment for various offences.
209(3)	Dishonest failure to observe requirements on making loans to directors or related companies.
254T	Paying dividends except out of profits.
286	Failure to keep proper accounting records.
312	Obstruction of an auditor.
314-7	Failure to comply with requirements for the preparation of financial statements.
437D(5)	Unauthorised dealing with company's property during administration.
438B(4)	Failure by directors to assist administrator, deliver records and provide information.
438C(5)	Failure to deliver up books and records to the administrator.
590	Failure to disclose property, concealed or removed property, concealed a debt due to the company, altered books of the company, fraudulently obtained credit on behalf of the company, material omission from Report as to Affairs or false representation to creditors.

### Recoverable Transactions

#### Preferences

A preference is a transaction, such as a payment by the company to a creditor, in which the creditor receiving the payment is preferred over the general body of creditors. The relevant period for the payment commences six months before the commencement of the liquidation. The company must have been insolvent at the time of the transaction, or become insolvent because of the transaction.

Where a creditor receives a preference, the payment is voidable as against a liquidator and is liable to be paid back to the liquidator subject to the creditor being able to successfully maintain any of the defences available to the creditor under the Corporations Act.

#### Uncommercial Transaction

An uncommercial transaction is one that it may be expected that a reasonable person in the company's circumstances would not have entered into, having regard to:

- the benefit or detriment to the company;
- the respective benefits to other parties; and,
- any other relevant matter.



To be voidable, an uncommercial transaction must have occurred during the two years before the liquidation. However, if a related entity is a party to the transaction, the period is four years and if the intention of the transaction is to defeat creditors, the period is ten years.

The company must have been insolvent at the time of the transaction, or become insolvent because of the transaction.

### **Unfair Loan**

A loan is unfair if and only if the interest was extortionate when the loan was made or has since become extortionate. There is no time limit on unfair loans – they only must be entered into before the winding up began.

### **Arrangements to avoid employee entitlements**

If an employee suffers loss because a person (including a director) enters into an arrangement or transaction to avoid the payment of employee entitlements, the liquidator or the employee may seek to recover compensation from that person. It will only be necessary to satisfy the court that there was a breach on the balance of probabilities. There is no time limit on when the transaction occurred.

### **Unreasonable payments to directors**

Liquidators have the power to reclaim '*unreasonable payments*' made to directors by companies prior to liquidation. The provision relates to payments made to or on behalf of a director or close associate of a director. The transaction must have been unreasonable, and have been entered into during the 4 years leading up to a company's liquidation, regardless of its solvency at the time the transaction occurred.

### **Voidable charges**

Certain charges over company property are voidable by a liquidator:

- circulating security interest created within six months of the liquidation, unless it secures a subsequent advance;
- unregistered security interests;
- security interests in favour of related parties who attempt to enforce the security within six months of its creation.

## **Insolvent trading**

In the following circumstances, directors may be personally liable for insolvent trading by the company:

- a person is a director at the time a company incurs a debt;
- the company is insolvent at the time of incurring the debt or becomes insolvent because of incurring the debt;
- at the time the debt was incurred, there were reasonable grounds to suspect that the company was insolvent;
- the director was aware such grounds for suspicion existed; and
- a reasonable person in a like position would have been so aware.

The law provides that the liquidator, and in certain circumstances the creditor who suffered the loss, may recover from the director, an amount equal to the loss or damage suffered. Similar provisions exist to pursue holding companies for debts incurred by their subsidiaries.

A defence is available under the law where the director can establish:

- there were reasonable grounds to expect that the company was solvent and they did so expect;
- they did not take part in management for illness or some other good reason; or
- they took all reasonable steps to prevent the company incurring the debt.

The proceeds of any recovery for insolvent trading by a liquidator are available for distribution to the unsecured creditors before the secured creditors.

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