DEVELOPMENT OF QUALIFICATION STANDARDS
FOR VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA) POSITIONS
FILLED UNDER 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3)

1. SCOPE. This appendix provides VA procedures for the development of qualification standards by VHA Central Office program officials and occupation-specific subject matter experts, working with representatives of the Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations, for VHA positions under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3). Authority is given to the Secretary under 38 U.S.C. § 7402 to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in § 7401(3).

2. BACKGROUND. The following provides basic information about qualification standards and specific information about VA qualification standards.

   a. A qualification standard is a statement of the minimum requirements that an individual must meet to be qualified for entry into and promotion in the occupation. This includes education, experience, citizenship, credentialing requirements (licensure, registration, certification), physical requirements and specific competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics).

   b. The basic qualification requirements for individuals appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 74 in occupations identified in section 7401(3), are contained in VA qualification standards approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs upon recommendation of the Under Secretary for Health.

   c. The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration is authorized to approve for the Secretary, qualification standards and examining guides that are established within the Department.

   d. Qualification standards for individuals appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) are based primarily on the rank-in-person concept where the combination of individuals’ accomplishments, performance and qualifications determine their grade level. This differs from the Title 5 rank-in-position concept where the grade level is based solely on the duties and responsibilities of the position held. For positions above the full-performance (journey level) the complexity of the assignment and scope of responsibility are considered in establishing grade levels.

   e. The qualification standards will be used extensively by members of the occupation who are not human resources professionals. Therefore, the language of Title 38 Hybrid qualification standards must be plain and clear without excessive use of human resources references.

   f. These standards apply to all appointments in Title 38 Hybrid occupations under authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) regardless of the nature or tenure of the appointment.

   g. Current VA qualification standards for Title 38 Hybrid positions are located in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, I-G1 through the last appendix.

3. IMPLICATION. Qualification standards are critically important documents necessary for the identification of candidates with the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform VA’s work.
Qualification standards establish basic requirements which are predictive of successful performance. The application of qualification standards in VHA is an integral part of ensuring a fully qualified workforce is available to care for our patients.

4. INTERPRETING QUALIFICATION STANDARDS. The following information is pertinent to the interpretation of VA qualification standards:

   a. VHA appointing officials and Professional Standards Boards [(with the exception of Medical Support Assistants; Medical Support Assistants are covered under Part III Appendix Q),] act for the Under Secretary for Health in applying the qualification standards in a fair and consistent manner. Such decisions are made through an analysis of personal data and/or experience records.

   b. When there is disagreement on the interpretation of a qualification standard, the appropriate HRM Officer may request an interpretation or decision from the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management and Labor Relations (059). A courtesy copy of such request will be sent to the appropriate VHA Program Official in VA Central Office, and representatives of union organizations at the national level.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES. The following is an explanation of responsibilities associated with the development of VA qualification standards:

   a. Qualification standards are developed by teams with representatives from the Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations and subject matter experts from VHA. At least 25% of the VHA team membership will be non-managerial members who are performing the work as a full time practitioner.

   b. VHA Field facilities may be requested to review and comment on drafts of VA qualification standards.

   c. Professional Standards Boards may recommend changes to qualification standards electronically to the Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations (059) to improve the quality and clarity of the standards. The Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations (059) will consult with the appropriate VHA Program Officials before final proposed changes are submitted for consideration.

6. GENERAL GUIDELINES

b. **Education and Grade Equivalents for one-grade interval positions.** The following table should be used as a guideline for determining appropriate grade levels based on education substitution alone. Specific education substitutions will be included in the individual occupation qualification standard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Qualifying Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GS-2</td>
<td>High school graduation or equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-3</td>
<td>1 year above high school with courses related to the occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Completion of an intensive, specialized course of study of less than 1 year may meet in full the experience requirements for GS-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-4</td>
<td>2 years above high school with courses related to the occupation or associate’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-5</td>
<td>4 academic years above high school leading to a bachelor’s degree with courses related to the occupation, or Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-6 and above</td>
<td>Graduate education or an internship may be used to substitute for specialized experience only in those instances where it is directly related to the position being filled.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Educational training programs, such as an internship, practicum, etc., that are included in, or supplemental to, an academic degree are not creditable for professional experience. Such programs are considered part of the basic requirements for professional practice in the field.

c. **Education and Grade Equivalents for two-grade interval positions.** The following table should be used as a guideline for determining appropriate grade levels based on education substitution alone. Specific education substitutions will be included in the individual occupation qualification standard. In some VHA occupations graduate education leading to a degree may not be substituted for the full degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Qualifying Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GS-5</td>
<td>4 academic years above high school leading to a bachelor’s degree, or Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-7</td>
<td>See Advanced Entry-Level Placement Criteria (for two-grade interval work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-9</td>
<td>Master’s degree (or equivalent graduate degree such as LL.B. or J.D.) or 2 academic years of progressively higher level graduate education in a related field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS-11</td>
<td>Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree or 3 academic years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a degree in a related field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Educational training programs, such as an internship, practicum, etc., that are included in, or supplemental to, an academic degree are not creditable for professional experience. Such programs are considered part of the basic requirements for professional practice in the field.
d. **Criteria for Advanced Entry-Level Placement.** Applicants who meet all qualification requirements for the GS-5 grade level of *two-grade* interval occupations may be appointed at the GS-7 grade level if they possess one of the following:

1. Bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university in a major field of study related to the Title 38 Hybrid occupation, including those occupations that have a positive education requirement.

2. Bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university unrelated to the Title 38 Hybrid occupation that included or was supplemented by at least one of the following:

   a. At least 30 semester hours (or at least the same number of hours required by the educational institution for a major field) of directly related, upper level undergraduate courses (e.g., at least 200-course level or higher, or as identified by the college or university) for the hybrid occupation, or one full year of graduate level coursework (typically at least 15-18 semester hours) for the hybrid occupation; or

   b. Directly related practicum/internship in the hybrid occupation, either included in the degree or post-degree; or

   c. Directly related certification/licensure/registration for the hybrid occupation.

3. Bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, with an exemplary academic record as demonstrated by at least one of the following:

   a. Class Standing: Applicants must be in the upper third of the graduating class in the college, university, or major subdivision, such as the College of Liberal Arts or the School of Business Administration, based on completed courses.

   b. Grade-Point Average (GPA): Applicants must have a grade-point average of:

      1. 3.0 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B" or better) as recorded on their official transcript, or as computed based on 4 years of education, or as computed based on courses completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum; or

      2. 3.5 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B+" or better) based on the average of the required courses completed in the major field or the required courses in the major field completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum.

   c. Election to Membership in a National Scholastic Honor Society: Applicants can be considered eligible based on membership in one of the national scholastic honor societies. These honor societies are listed in the *Association of College Honor Societies: Booklet of Information* (1992-95) and/or Baird's *Manual of American College Fraternities* (1991). Membership in a freshman honor society cannot be used to meet the requirements of this provision.

e. **Intervening Grade Levels.** In general, standards for two-grade interval work (e.g., professional/scientific) are written in a two-grade interval progression whereas standards for technical/medical support work are written in a one-grade interval progression. In writing qualification
standards, intervening grades in two-grade interval standards may be used to denote assignments of unusual responsibility/complexity, such as the sole practitioner, team leader, or other special circumstance unique to the occupation. In addition, intervening grade levels may be included in grandfather clauses for current employees. VHA Program Officials in VA Central Office who wish to include intervening grade levels in the qualification standard for a particular occupation must submit such request, with supporting documentation, through the Under Secretary for Health (10) to Human Resources and Administration (006). Final determination on all grade levels will be made during the job analysis process.

f. **Full Performance Levels.** For occupations covered by these guidelines, the full performance (journey) level may vary depending on the complexities of the assignment or the competencies possessed by the individual and is not dependent on the entry level grade of the occupation. In this rank-in-person system, the promotion potential of positions may not be limited to grades below the full performance level as identified in the qualification standard.

g. **Pay Determinations.** Grade levels should not be used to address pay issues or problems. Recruitment or retention incentives (e.g., special salary rates, recruitment bonuses, relocation bonuses, retention bonuses, etc.) may be used to address pay-related recruitment or retention issues.