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(1) Is held by another employee with lower retention standing in the same tenure group and subgroup; and

(2) Is not more than three grades (or appropriate grade intervals or equivalent) below the position from which the employee was released, except that for a preference eligible employee with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more the limit is five grades (or appropriate grade intervals or equivalent). (The agency uses the grade progression of only the released employee's position of record to determine the applicable grades (or appropriate grade intervals or equivalent) of the employee's retreat right. The agency does not consider the grade progression of the position to which the employee has a retreat right.); and

(3) Is the same position, or an essentially identical position, formerly held by the released employee on a permanent basis as a competing employee in a Federal agency (*i.e.*, when held by the released employee in an executive, legislative, or judicial branch agency, the position would have been placed in tenure groups I, II, or III, or equivalent). In determining whether a position is essentially identical, the determination is based on the competitive level criteria found in § 351.403, but not necessarily in regard to the respective grade, classification series, type of work schedule, or type of service, of the two positions.

(d) *Limitation.* An employee with a current annual performance rating of record of minimally successful (Level 2) or equivalent may be assigned under paragraph (c) of this section only to a position held by another employee with a current annual performance rating of record no higher than minimally successful (Level 2) or equivalent.

(e) *Pay rates.* (1) The determination of equivalent grade intervals shall be based on a comparison of representative rates.

(2) Each employee's assignment rights shall be determined on the basis of the pay rates in effect on the date of issuance of specific reduction-in-force notices, except that when it is officially known on the date of issuance of notices that new pay rates have been approved and will become effective by the effective date of the reduction in

force, assignment rights shall be determined on the basis of the new pay rates.

(f)(1) In determining applicable grades (or grade intervals) under §§ 351.701(b)(2) and 351.701(c)(2), the agency uses the grade progression of the released employee's position of record to determine the grade (or interval) limits of the employee's assignment rights.

(2) For positions covered by the General Schedule, the agency must determine whether a one-grade, two-grade, or mixed grade interval progression is applicable to the position of the released employee.

(3) For positions not covered by the General Schedule, the agency must determine the normal line of progression for each occupational series and grade level to determine the grade (or interval) limits of the released employee's assignment rights. If the agency determines that there is no normal line of progression for an occupational series and grade level, the agency provides the released employee with assignment rights to positions within three actual grades lower on a one-grade basis. The normal line of progression may include positions in different pay systems.

(4) For positions where no grade structure exists, the agency determines a line of progression for each occupation and pay rate, and provides assignment rights to positions within three grades (or intervals) lower on that basis.

(5) If the released employee holds a position that is less than three grades above the lowest grade in the applicable classification system (*e.g.*, the employee holds a GS-2 position), the agency provides the released employee with assignment rights up to three actual grades lower on a one-grade basis in other pay systems.

[51 FR 319, Jan. 3, 1986, as amended at 56 FR 65417, Dec. 17, 1991; 60 FR 3063, Jan. 13, 1995; 60 FR 44254, Aug. 25, 1995; 62 FR 62502, Nov. 24, 1997; 63 FR 32594, June 15, 1998; 65 FR 62991, Oct. 20, 2000]

§ 351.702 Qualifications for assignment.

(a) Except as provided in § 351.703, an employee is qualified for assignment under § 351.701 if the employee:

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(1) Meets the OPM standards and requirements for the position, including any minimum educational requirement, and any selective placement factors established by the agency;

(2) Is physically qualified, with reasonable accommodation where appropriate, to perform the duties of the position;

(3) Meets any special qualifying condition which the OPM has approved for the position; and

(4) Has the capacity, adaptability, and special skills needed to satisfactorily perform the duties of the position without undue interruption. This determination includes recency of experience, when appropriate.

(b) The sex of an employee may not be considered in determining whether an employee is qualified for a position, except for positions which OPM has determined certification of eligibles by sex is justified.

(c) An employee who is released from a competitive level during a leave of absence because of a compensable injury may not be denied an assignment right solely because the employee is not physically qualified for the duties of the position if the physical disqualification resulted from the compensable injury. Such an employee must be afforded appropriate assignment rights subject to recovery as provided by 5 U.S.C. 8151 and part 353 of this chapter.

(d) If an agency determines, on the basis of evidence before it, that a preference eligible employee who has a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more is not able to fulfill the physical requirements of a position to which the employee would otherwise have been assigned under this part, the agency must notify the OPM of this determination. At the same time, the agency must notify the employee of the reasons for the determination and of the right to respond, within 15 days of the notification, to the OPM which will require the agency to demonstrate that the notification was timely sent to the employee's last known address. The OPM shall make a final determination concerning the physical ability of the employee to perform the duties of the position. This determination must be made before the agency may select any other person for

the position. When the OPM has completed its review of the proposed disqualification on the basis of physical disability, it must send its finding to both the agency and the employee. The agency must comply with the findings of the OPM. The functions of the OPM under this paragraph may not be delegated to an agency.

(e) An agency may formally designate as a trainee or developmental position a position in a program with all of the following characteristics:

(1) The program must have been designed to meet the agency's needs and requirements for the development of skilled personnel;

(2) The program must have been formally designated, with its provisions made known to employees and supervisors;

(3) The program must be developmental by design, offering planned growth in duties and responsibilities, and providing advancement in recognized lines of career progression; and

(4) The program must be fully implemented, with the participants chosen through standard selection procedures. To be considered qualified for assignment under § 351.701 to a formally designated trainee or developmental position in a program having all of the characteristics covered in paragraphs (e)(1), (2), (3), and (4) of this section, an employee must meet all of the conditions required for selection and entry into the program.

[51 FR 319, Jan. 3, 1986, as amended at 60 FR 3063, Jan. 13, 1995]

§ 351.703 Exception to qualifications.

An agency may assign an employee to a vacant position under § 351.201(b) or § 351.701 of this part without regard to OPM's standards and requirements for the position if:

(a) The employee meets any minimum education requirement for the position; and

(b) The agency determines that the employee has the capacity, adaptability, and special skills needed to satisfactorily perform the duties and responsibilities of the position.

[56 FR 65417, Dec. 17, 1991]