

Article 67 Skills Certification

Preamble

In accordance with PL 110-389, skills certification is a requirement for appropriate employees of the Veterans Benefits Administration who are responsible for processing claims for compensation and pension benefits.

Labor and Management agree that an effective Skills Certification program commits both parties to a standard of excellence in the timeliness, quality, and quantity of training, to improve service to our nation's Veterans.

Section 1 – Purpose, Scope and Applicability

- a. This Article applies to appropriate bargaining unit employees of the Veterans Benefits Administration for whom the Skills Certification program is applicable and are responsible for processing claims for compensation and pension benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Skills Certification is not intended for employees who are in a trainee status (non-journey level).
- b. The purposes of Skills Certification are to comply with 38 USC § 7732A; to provide a mechanism for measuring employees attainment of the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to be successful in their position; and to identify training needs. Skill Certification test results will not negatively impact an employee's performance appraisal.
- c. Employees as identified in Section 1.a. of this Article will be required to take the skills certification test within one year and to retake the test each time offered until certification is achieved. To the extent practicable, skills certification testing will be offered twice per year for each position covered by the VBA Skills Certification program. Employees will be required to sit for periodic recertification as long as they remain in the position.
- d. Employees who have occupied the VSR GS-10 within the full-performance GS-11 career ladder for more than one year will be required to sit for Skills Certification within the first year after this agreement is implemented. For the VSRs on the career ladder track, the effective date of promotion will be the first date of the pay period

Ch
1/9/12

JBN
1/12

following notification of results, provided they meet the promotion criteria in Article 23 (Merit Promotion). Current employees in a VSR career ladder position that included the full-performance GS-11 level when they entered the career ladder prior to implementation of this Article will have the opportunity to achieve GS-11 upon passing the VSR certification test. VSRs who are unable to pass certification after three consecutive attempts, counted from the effective date of this Article, will be placed in a VSR position where the full performance level is a GS-10.

- e. Whenever the Department develops an annual schedule for skills certification, the Union will be provided a copy. The Union will be permitted to observe the Skills Certification testing. The local union will be provided notification at least 7 work days before the actual date of each test. In the event the 7 work day notice is not provided to the Union, the Department will explain in writing why the 7 work day notice was not provided. In the event the 7 work day notice is not provided, the results of the test will not be invalidated. The schedule for Skills Certification testing, and any changes to the schedule, will be posted on the VBA Intranet.

Section 2 – Program and Test Administration

- a. The instrument (test) used to determine an employee's proficiency under the Skills Certification Program shall be valid and reliable, using generally accepted statistical and testing measures and methodologies, and be consistent with *EEOC Uniform Guidelines*. When developing certification examinations, the Department will consult with appropriate individuals or entities, including examination development experts, interested stakeholders, and employee representatives; and consider the data gathered and produced under 38 USC 7731(c)(3).
- b. The parties agree that the purpose and intent of the provisions contained herein are to ensure that the Skills Certification program will be administered fairly, equitably, and consistently across the Veterans Benefits Administration.
- c. All employees required to sit for the skills certification test will be notified sufficiently in advance of their right to request reasonable accommodations; for example, additional time, alternate test site and

all
1/9/12

jsa
1.12