

STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Veterinary Medical Officers, GS-701.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Veterinary Medical Officer Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Appendix II-F32, in its entirety. The new standard is effective on the date of issuance of this handbook. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#). Significant changes include:
 - a. Adds licensure as a basic requirement; and
 - b. Includes qualification requirements for the GS-11 grade level.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

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APPENDIX F32. QUALIFICATION STANDARD**[VETERINARY MEDICAL OFFICER (LABORATORY ANIMAL MEDICINE) GS-701-11/15****AUTHORITY. 38 U.S.C. 7402**

1. COVERAGE. This qualification standard outlines the requirements for appointment as a Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) (Laboratory Animal Medicine) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). VMOs provide support to VHA Research and Development (R&D) programs for the advancement of healthcare programs. Laboratory animal medicine is a veterinary medical specialty recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), and in which VMOs achieve specialty board certification through the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine (ACLAM). VMOs concentrating in laboratory animal medicine have gained specialized training and experience uniquely suited to ensure an adequate standard of care and use for laboratory animals and to support the ethical conduct of biomedical research using animals. VMOs function primarily as laboratory animal medicine practitioners but may also perform biomedical research regarding the causes, treatments, and prevention of human diseases.

2. DUTIES. VMOs perform duties that may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Direct the operation of the animal facility to ensure local program compliance with current animal welfare laws, regulations and policies and to support R&D programs using animal subjects.
- b. Provide professional guidance, services and technical support to investigators at VA medical centers in planning, executing and directing R&D activities using animal subjects. This includes guidance and consultation on comparative biology and medicine, zoonotic disease, technology, husbandry, medical and surgical care and the selection, procurement, preparation, and use of laboratory animals.
- c. Conceive and conduct independent and collaborative research including studies designed to gain new knowledge about laboratory animals, which will improve the quality of animal care and promote humane aspects of research through the selection of proper and new biological models, research environments and techniques.
- d. Establish and maintain programs of appropriate veterinary medical care that include the use of methods to prevent, control, diagnose and treat diseases and injury and that will ensure the provision of adequate pre-procedural and post-procedural care.
- e. Provide education and training for scientists and technicians on humane methods of animal care and experimentation.
- f. Serve as the Attending Veterinarian on the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.
- g. Contribute to the promotion of favorable community relations and increased public appreciation of the importance of animal studies in improving patient care and the quality of Veterans' lives.

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h. Serve as a subject matter expert by contributing to efforts by VA Central Office intended to improve animal research through the support of R&D programs throughout the VA health care system, by assisting in the development of policies and guidance that pertain to animal research, and by participating in activities that assess animal research activities within VA.

i. Provide policy and regulatory guidance and oversight to VA animal research programs.

3. BASIC REQUIREMENTS. To qualify for appointment, all applicants must meet the basic education and licensure requirements.

a. Education

(1) Possess a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) or equivalent degree, i.e., Veterinary Medical Doctor (VMD), obtained at a college or school of veterinary medicine accredited by the [AVMA Council on Education](#); or

(2) Graduate from a foreign veterinary medical school not accredited by the [AVMA Council on Education](#) possessing one of the following:

(a) Proof of certification of final transcript by the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG); or

(b) Current, permanent, full and unrestricted license to practice veterinary medicine in a State, District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or a territory of the United States that includes successful completion of the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE) or its predecessors, the National Board Examination (NBE) and the Clinical Competency Test (CCT); or

(c) Proof that the education obtained in a foreign veterinary medical program is equivalent to that gained in a veterinary medical program that is accredited by the [AVMA Council on Education](#). Under this provision, equivalency is established only if an AVMA-accredited veterinary medical school or college accepts the graduate's final transcript from the foreign veterinary medical school at full value for placement into an advanced degree, postgraduate educational program or training program (e.g., residency or graduate program); and

(d) Graduates of foreign veterinary medical programs must also provide proof of proficiency in the English language by successfully completing one of the nationally and internationally recognized examinations that incorporate assessments of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Examples of examinations that assess mastery of the English language include:

1. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) — Minimum scores for the TOEFL are 560 for the paper-based version; 220 for the computer-based version; or overall score of 83 for the internet-based version (including 26 or higher in speaking, 26 or higher in listening, and 17 or higher in writing). For the computer-based and paper-based test versions, applicants must also complete the Test of Spoken English (TSE) and the Test of Written English (TWE). Minimum required scores are 55 for the TSE and 5.5 for the TWE; or

2. Academic tests (listening, writing and speaking) offered by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Applicants must achieve a minimum overall band score of 7.0, with at least 7.0 in speaking, 6.5 in listening, and 6.0 in writing; or

3. Canadian Academic English Language Assessment (CAEL). Applicants must achieve a minimum overall band score of 70, with at least 60 in speaking, 60 in listening, and 50 in writing.

b. Licensure

(1) Possess a current, permanent, full and unrestricted license to practice veterinary medicine in a State, District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or a territory of the United States that includes successful completion of the NAVLE or its predecessors, the NBE and the CCT.

(2) An employee who enters this occupation with the basic requirement for licensure, but fails to maintain licensure must be immediately removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment. At the discretion of the appointing official, an employee who fails to maintain licensure may be reassigned to another occupation for which he/she qualifies if a placement opportunity exists.

4. GRADE LEVEL REQUIREMENTS. In addition to meeting the basic requirements, applicants must meet the grade level requirements for the position for which they wish to be considered. Applicants may qualify for each grade level through the attainment of specialized experience, advanced degree, residency or post-graduate training, or board certification as indicated below.

a. Specialized Experience. Specialized experience must demonstrate the ability of the applicant to independently perform the veterinary medical duties required for the position. Only experience gained after completing the basic education requirements described in paragraph 3 and in a biomedical research setting in which Public Health Service Policy and United States Department of Agriculture Animal Welfare Act Regulations were applied under the jurisdiction of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee is creditable. Experience gained at a pet veterinary clinic with species commonly used in research does not count towards meeting the specialized experience requirements. When calculating the length of specialized experience, applicants are considered to have gained 1 year of experience through the completion of either 12 months or 52 weeks of specialized experience, whichever comes first. Qualifying part-time specialized experience is credited according to its relation to the full-time workweek (i.e., 40 hours). The number of years of specialized experience required for each grade level is as follows:

- (1) **GS-11.** No specialized experience required at the GS-11 grade level.
- (2) **GS-12.** 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-11 grade level.
- (3) **GS-13.** 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-12 grade level.
- (4) **GS-14.** 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.
- (5) **GS-15.** 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-14 grade level.

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b. **Advanced Degrees.** Advanced degrees (i.e., graduate degrees) are creditable towards meeting the qualifications for the GS-12 and GS-13 grade levels. To be creditable, applicants must have earned the advanced degree at an accredited college or school in the area of specialization of laboratory animal medicine, laboratory animal science or in an area directly related to the practice of laboratory animal medicine. The advanced degree must have been earned in addition to the basic education described in paragraph 3 or earned in a dual DVM/graduate degree program. The type of qualifying advanced degrees creditable for each grade level is as follows:

- (1) **GS-11.** No advanced degree required above the basic education requirement for the GS-11 grade level.
- (2) **GS-12.** Master of Science in laboratory animal medicine, laboratory animal science or an area directly related to the practice of laboratory animal medicine.
- (3) **GS-13.** Ph.D. degree in laboratory animal medicine, laboratory animal science or an area directly related to the practice of laboratory animal medicine.
- (4) **GS-14.** None qualifying at the GS-14 grade level.
- (5) **GS-15.** None qualifying at the GS-15 grade level.

c. **Residency and Post-Graduate Training.** Residency or post-graduate training in an ACLAM-approved program is creditable towards meeting the grade level requirements. The discipline or specialty of the residency or post-graduate training program must be laboratory animal medicine, laboratory animal science or in an area directly related to the practice of laboratory animal medicine. Applicants must demonstrate successful completion of a residency or post-graduate training program or a level of satisfactory progression in the residency or post-graduate training program. The number of years of residency or post-graduate training required is as follows:

- (1) **GS-11.** 1 year of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.
- (2) **GS-12.** 2 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.
- (3) **GS-13.** 3 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.
- (4) **GS-14.** 4 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.
- (5) **GS-15.** 5 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.

d. **Board Certification.** Board certification for the laboratory animal medicine specialty is demonstrated by ACLAM Diplomate status. ACLAM Diplomate status is creditable with specialized experience or residency and post-graduate training towards meeting the grade level requirements. ACLAM Diplomate status is awarded to individuals who have completed a rigorous post-graduate training or residency program or who have gained specialized laboratory animal experience. ACLAM Diplomates must also meet publication requirements and pass certifying exams. The certifying exams cover laboratory animal biology, laboratory animal resources management, clinical laboratory animal medicine and surgery, laboratory animal pathology and animal experimentation. **NOTE:** *Specialized experience and residency and post-graduate training requirements listed below must meet the criteria described in the applicable qualifying category above. An applicant with ACLAM Diplomate status may immediately qualify for a position up to the GS-13 grade level.* ACLAM Diplomate status is creditable for each grade level as follows:

(1) **GS-11.** ACLAM Diplomate status.

(2) **GS-12.** ACLAM Diplomate status and 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-11 grade level or ACLAM Diplomate status and 2 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.

(3) **GS-13.** ACLAM Diplomate status and 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-12 grade level or ACLAM Diplomate status and 3 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.

(4) **GS-14.** ACLAM Diplomate status and 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-13 grade level or ACLAM Diplomate status and 4 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.

(5) **GS-15.** ACLAM Diplomate status and 1 year of specialized veterinary experience equivalent to the GS-14 grade level or ACLAM Diplomate status and 5 years of progressively responsible training in an ACLAM-approved internship, residency program or fellowship training program.

5. SUPERVISORY POSITIONS. Use the Supervisory Qualification Guide in the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#) in conjunction with the requirements of this standard for supervisory or managerial positions.

6. GRANDFATHERING PROVISION. All persons employed in VHA in this occupation on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including education and licensure that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all of the requirements in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:

a. Employees grandfathered into the GS-701 occupational series under the provision of this paragraph may be reassigned, promoted up to the full performance level of a career ladder or changed to lower grade within the GS-701 occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the full performance level or placed in a supervisory or managerial position.

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b. Employees who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their appointment extended or be reappointed, on a temporary or permanent basis, until they fully meet the qualification requirements of the standard.

c. Employees initially grandfathered into this occupation who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure that meet all basic requirements of the qualification standard must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

d. If an employee who is retained under this provision leaves the GS-701 occupational series, the employee loses protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the occupation.

7. FEE-BASIS UTILIZATION AND CONTRACT. Applicants seeking employment through a fee-basis appointment or contract must meet all of the requirements of the VMO qualification standard. Employees who were appointed through a fee-basis appointment or contract prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their appointment or contract extended or be reappointed until they fully meet the requirements of the standard.

8. WAIVERS. If after positive recruitment activities there are no acceptable applicants who meet these requirements, the Chief, Research and Development Officer (109P), may authorize a medical center director to recruit otherwise qualified applicants who show evidence of training, experience, and competence to be equally protective of patient health and safety. Requests to initiate broad-based recruitment using a modified standard that meets the requirements of chapter 2, section D, paragraph 9 of this part must be submitted through channels to the Office of Human Resources Management, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).

9. PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS. Applicants must be physically and mentally able to safely and efficiently perform the full range of duties of the position without creating hazards to themselves or others. In most cases, a specific physical condition or impairment will not automatically disqualify an applicant for appointment. Reasonable accommodation may also be considered in determining an applicant's ability to perform the duties of a position.

10. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS. In addition to meeting the other requirements of this qualification standard, applicants must possess the writing, oral communication, and interpersonal skills necessary to perform the duties of the position to be filled. These personal competencies may be evaluated by means of an interview.]