

# **3 FAH-2 H-400 Appendix A**

## **EXCEPTION GRADES**

*(TL:FSNH-4; 8-3-93)*

### **1. General**

This extends and augments the procedures outlined in section 3 FAH-2 H-453.4 of this handbook for allocation of positions to levels above the highest class for which a standard exists. Exception grades are designed to provide more flexibility in the FSN position classification system in order to meet highly exceptional or unusual circumstances in the employment of FSNs at posts which cannot be accommodated satisfactorily through the normal position classification process.

The exception grade procedures may not be used to resolve pay problems. These are resolved by timely salary surveys or the exception rate procedures contained in subchapter 3 FAH-2 H-240 of this handbook.

### **2. Definition**

An exception grade is defined as a grade level designation for any FSN position which differs (either higher or lower) from the grade level criteria set forth in the guidelines and position classification standards published in chapter 3 FAH-2 H-400 of this handbook.

### **3. Policy**

Exception grades may be authorized in the following circumstances.

Posts should note that positions granted exception grades under paragraphs 3C or 3D below, automatically lose this status when they become unincumbered. If the head of the employing agency feels conditions continue to justify this status, then that individual must again request approval from the appropriate agency headquarters office.

A. The social or cultural environment of a country results in the ranking of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a position in a manner which clearly differs from and warrants a different ranking than that reflected in published FSN position classification standards.

B. The official performance of assigned duties presents exceptional and constant danger to an FSN employee or employees. This must be certified on an annual basis by the responsible Regional Security Officer. The certification must be sent to PER/FSN.

Note: This criterion will not apply to all FSN positions at a post nor will it apply to danger unrelated to the actual performance of assigned duties.

C. Peculiar, major, and exceptionally valuable contributions are made by an employee on a continuing basis which significantly enhances a post's ability to accomplish its mission.

Note: An employee's sustained superior performance, while valuable to an organization, may not in and of itself be the basis for requesting an exception grade. The valuable contributions made by an employee should require substantially greater knowledge, skills, and abilities than that normally required by the position. One-time or infrequent valuable contributions should be recognized by the incentive awards system.

D. The responsibilities assigned to a position and the knowledge, skills and abilities required for their satisfactory performance clearly and substantially exceed the FSN position classification criteria, guidelines, and published standards for the FSN-12 level. Positions which meet this exceptional circumstance may be classified to the FSN-13 level. Although no FSN-13 classification standards exist, positions which are determined by the appropriate headquarters office of the employing agency to exceed FSN-12 criteria may be classified to the FSN-13 level within the numerical limitations noted below. The title and series code designations will be based on existing FSN position classification practices, guidelines, and standards.

Note: The maximum number of FSN-13 positions an agency may allocate is limited to 20% of its total FSN-12 and FSN-13 level direct-hire positions worldwide. This is an overall agency limitation. The number of FSN-13 exception grade positions a post may have will be based on merit and not the current number of FSN-12 positions at post.

## **4. Request and Approval Procedures**

### **A. Exception Grade Requests**

(1) All requests for exception grades must cite which of the criterion listed in section 3 applies and include:

a. A current position description certified by the post's personnel officer in block 12;

b. An Analysis and Evaluation Worksheet detailing the exceptional circumstances involved, including an estimate of the length of time they are expected to exist;

c. A staffing pattern and an organization chart indicating supervisory and reporting relationships; and

d. Any other relevant information, e.g., program documents such as the consular package.

(2) Requests for positions meeting criteria set forth in sections 3A or 3B, above, must include a statement indicating the concurrence of all USG agencies at post.

(3) Requests for positions meeting criteria set forth in sections 3C and 3D, above, do not require post interagency concurrence. Other agency views, if any, however, may be included in the request.

(4) All requests shall be submitted through a post's personnel office to the appropriate headquarters office of the employing agency. The personnel office should assist all elements of the post in developing any proposed exception grade request and ensure that all required documentation is present before submission.

## **B. Exception Grade Classification Authority and Authorization Procedures**

**No post is delegated classification authority for granting exception grades.** On receipt of a properly documented request, the responsible agency headquarters office will take appropriate classification action.

(1) Exception grade requests for positions meeting criteria sections 3A or 3B above shall be submitted to the Department of State's Office of Foreign Service National Personnel (PER/FSN). PER/FSN will distribute copies of the request to the appropriate headquarters offices of agencies represented at the requesting post and coordinate the response.

(2) Exception Grade Requests for Position's Meeting Criteria sections 3C or 3D.

a. The following offices are authorized to approve exception grades under criteria sections 3C and 3D for FSN positions in their agencies.

**State:** The Office of Foreign Service National Personnel (PER/FSN) in consultation with the responsible regional bureau's executive office. (Exception grade requests should be sent to PER/FSN with a copy to the appropriate regional bureau's executive office.)

**USIA:** M/PFN

**AID:** FA/HRM/PPM/PMC

**Commerce:** The Office of Foreign Service Personnel, US and Foreign Commercial Service (ITA/US & FCS/OFSP)

**Agriculture:** FAS/M/PO/FSO

**DOD:** DOD/ASD(FMP/PPP)

**Peace Corps:** Office of Personnel

Exception grade requests for FSN positions from agencies not listed above must be sent to PER/FSN for a determination of the appropriate authorizing office. PER/FSN will provide classification advice and assistance to agencies at their request.

b. For approved exception grade requests, an agency should provide PER/FSN with copies of the original request, the agency's decision, and the notification to post.

c. With respect to the FSN-13 exception grade criteria, each agency should provide PER/FSN with the total number of its FSN-12 and 13 positions worldwide on an annual basis. Annually, PER/FSN will submit an exception grade report to all concerned agencies. It will include, among other information, the number and types of exception grades granted by each agency.

## **5. Administration of Approved Exception Grades**

### **A. Promotions**

Upon notification that an exception grade request is approved, post is authorized to promote the position's incumbent **in accordance with** section **3 FAM 952** . The effective date of promotion will be no sooner than the beginning of the first pay period following receipt of the approval notification.

### **B. Compensation**

(1) Incumbents of positions approved for exception grades falling within the salary structure at post will be paid accordingly.

(2) Incumbents of positions approved for the FSN-13 grade will be paid according to a salary range developed by PER/FSN according to guidelines in Chapter 3 FAH-2 H-200 , FSN Compensation.

### **C. Post Responsibilities**

Exception grades are normally granted on a temporary basis only. Posts are required to review periodically the circumstances supporting an exception grade and advise the appropriate authorizing office of any changes.

### **D. Position Classification Audits**

Positions granted exception grades may be audited by survey teams during major salary and benefit surveys at the request of the responsible headquarters agency.

### **E. Loss of Excepted Grade Status**

Positions may lose their exception grade status for a variety of reasons. Positions granted exception grades based on criteria 3C or 3D above, automatically lose this status when they become unincumbered. If the head of an agency at post feels conditions continue to justify this status, then that individual must again request approval from the appropriate agency headquarters office. Positions may also lose the exception grade as a result of changes in assigned responsibilities, sustained level of contribution, level of danger to the incumbent, social or cultural changes, etc.

Loss of exception grade status for any reason requires the position be downgraded to the appropriate grade level. Incumbents of downgraded positions are treated in accordance with section 3 FAM 950 .