



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#) (April 1998)
Factor: Factor 5, Difficulty of Typical Work Directed
Issue: Determining Base Level

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an OPM oversight division's response to a request for technical guidance. The agency asked whether the GSSG permitted crediting a GS-14 base level. It based the question on the wording in Factors 5 and 6. Factor 5 credits positions "GS-13 or higher, or equivalent" at Level 5-8. Factor 6 provides for crediting "work comparable in difficulty to the GS-13 or higher level" at Level 6-6a. The grades of the GS-14 nonsupervisory administrative positions directed were dependent on the crediting of Level 2-5, and followed the typical factor level pattern for GS-14 administrative work illustrated in *The Classifier's Handbook*.

Resolution

The oversight division found the GS-14 positions could not be used for base level purposes. The GSSG specifically excludes "work that is graded on an extraordinary degree of independence from supervision, or personal research accomplishments" from base level consideration. It does, however, permit adjusting the grades of such work for purposes of applying the guide to those appropriate for performance under "normal" supervision. This requirement continues previously established OPM classification policy that Level 2-5 is limited to administrative direction and, consequently, represents an extraordinary independence or freedom from supervision. Thus, where Level 2-5 is the grade-determining factor for a position, that level cannot be used toward determining the base level of work supervised in applying the GSSG. Similar adjustments must be made when reviewing positions covered by narrative standards for base level purposes.

The stated purpose of the GSSG is to evaluate the demands of overseeing “work through combined technical and administrative direction of others.” In contrast, Level 2-5 reflects administrative supervision. Additional support for this interpretation is found within the GSSG itself as noted by the agency. First, Level 5-8 is for “GS-13 or higher, or equivalent.” Second, Level 6-6a is for “work comparable in difficulty to the GS-13 or higher level.” The wording in both these factors establishes an intended ceiling that meshes with the factor level patterns for both administrative and professional work in *The Classifier’s Handbook* in which positions at and above the GS-14 grade level are credited at Level 2-5.

These interpretive concepts parallel those in narrative standards, such as the Research Grants Grade Evaluation Guide (RGGEG). At the GS-14 grade level in the RGGEG, “Supervisory control is primarily administrative.” At the GS-15 grade level, “Supervision. . . is nominal.” In contrast, the classification of positions supervising GS-14 or higher graded positions typically is based on program management and not supervisory responsibilities. Classification of those positions is based on the application of appropriate program management classification standards and not the GSSG.