



Department of Energy

National Training Center
PO Box 5400
Albuquerque, NM 87185-5400

July 2, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR FEDERAL TECHNICAL CAPABILITY PROGRAM
FUNCTIONAL AREA QUALIFICATION
STANDARD SPONSORS

FROM:

Karen L. Boardman
KAREN L. BOARDMAN

FEDERAL TECHNICAL CAPABILITY PANEL CHAIR

SUBJECT:

Federal Technical Capability Panel's Issue Paper,
Federal Technical Capability Program-12-001,
Use of "Expert Level" in Qualification Path Forward

The Federal Technical Capability (FTC) Panel voted at the May 15, 2012, FTC Panel Face-to-Face Meeting, to delete all reference to expert-level knowledge requirements in FAQs and that the FTC Panel should direct modification of the FAQs template to reflect the decision, and request any needed page changes to current FAQs. After discussion with some FAQs sponsors, I have added the following wording to the Issue Paper as direction to our FAQs Sponsors: The FTCP Chair will request FAQs Sponsors and their supporting Recognized Experts establish basic TQP qualification completion using Familiarity Level of Knowledge, Working Level of Knowledge, or a Demonstration of Ability. If a FAQs Sponsor/Recognized Expert Team determines level of knowledge beyond Working Level of Knowledge is required for some functional area tasks in accordance with the associated FAQs Job Task Analysis, that FAQs Sponsor should establish a "Master" TQP level qualification separate and distinct within that FAQs for a secondary or higher TQP qualification level. Supervisors and FTCP Agents identify TQP participation based on the duties and responsibilities of the position description, and would also be responsible to determine which TQP participants should achieve levels of qualification beyond basic TQP qualification.

As Department of Energy FTCP Chair, I request that you, as a FAQs Sponsor, and your supporting Recognized Experts establish basic Technical Qualification Programs (TQP) qualification completion using Familiarity Level of Knowledge, Working Level of Knowledge, or a Demonstration of Ability in your FAQs. If you and your Recognized Expert Team determine that a level of knowledge beyond Working Level of Knowledge is required for some functional area tasks in accordance with the associated FAQs Job Task Analysis, you should establish a

“Master” TQP level qualification separate and distinct within that FAQS for a secondary or higher TQP qualification level. Supervisors and FTC Panel Agents, through identified processes in their organizational TQP plan would then be responsible to determine which TQP participants should achieve levels of qualification beyond basic TQP qualification.

A path forward is identified in the FTCP Issue Paper FTCP-12-001 attached, consistent with the foregoing. If your team determines level of knowledge beyond Working Level of Knowledge is required for some functional area tasks in accordance with the associated FAQS Job Task Analysis, you should establish a “Master” TQP level qualification separately within that FAQS for a secondary or higher TQP qualification level above basic TQP FAQS qualification.

Thank you for your continued support.

Attachment: FTCP-12-001

cc:

CTAs:

Tom D’Agostino, NNSA CTA

Richard Lagdon, EM CTA

Carol Sohn, Science CTA

NNSA FTCP Agents:

Don Nichols, NA-SH-1

Jeanette Yarrington, HS-10

Patrick Romero, NA-MB-42

Dave Chaney, FTCP Advisor, NA-SH-2

Edna White, NA-SH-40

FTCP Issue Paper Use of “Expert Level” in Qualification

DOCUMENT NUMBER: FTCP-12-001

PROBLEM (Issue or Position): This paper examines the use of the term “expert level” in Functional area Qualification Standards (FAQSs) of the DOE Federal Technical Capability (FTC) Program.

BACKGROUND: At the request of the FTC Panel Chair, a team was assembled in 2010 to clarify qualification progression. Some related issues had been identified, including use of the term “subject matter expert”, and qualification progression for entry-level employees. This paper will focus on the use of the term “expert level”.

The term “subject matter expert” and the process for designating SMEs have been the subject of much discussion, including under the FY09 FTCP Operational Plan Goal 3, Objective 1. The most recent update to DOE Order 426.1, *Federal Technical Capability* describes a process to achieve Technical Expert status in Appendix B paragraph 4.f. through the “Expert Base” career development path. Designation as an expert is a professional development activity not a requirement.

The issue, “Re-evaluate the definition of expert level in functional area qualification standards”, FTCP issue paper FTCP-10-003, noted that expert-level competence was presumed needed for individuals to be evaluated against information contained in a DOE Directive or DOE Technical Standard. The issue was that expert-level knowledge was defined in each FAQS as “... a comprehensive, intensive knowledge of the subject or process sufficient to provide advice in the absence of procedural guidance.” If there is procedural guidance vis-à-vis the referenced DOE Directive or DOE Technical Standard, there is not an absence of procedural guidance. This caused concern over the validity of the definition and its application by FAQS development teams.

As the team focused on the use of the term “expert level”, the question of the need for knowledge level in FAQS competencies was raised. Previous interpretation of the language in the FAQSs was that Knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) were not required to be considered when evaluating an individual’s competence. Change 1 to DOE O 426.1 modified paragraph 4.b.(2)(f), Transportable, “For ease of transportability of qualifications between DOE elements, competencies and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) within the DOE General Technical Base Qualification Standard and the various DOE FAQSs must be used without modification or additions.” If KSAs must be used, then is there no longer a need to include knowledge levels in FAQS competencies? If competencies and KSAs are written clearly enough to adequately demonstrate the knowledge required to perform the associated duties and responsibilities, is the knowledge level still needed? Based on feedback received, the team decided to recommend leaving the knowledge levels in the competency statements.

The team recommends that the FTC Panel decide which of the following approaches best meets the needs of the FTC Program:

- a. Retain the FAQs expert-level definition as written.
- b. Delete all reference to expert-level knowledge requirements in FAQs.

If option "b" is selected, the FTC Panel should direct modification of the FAQs template to reflect the decision, and request any needed page changes to current FAQs. "The FTCP Chair will request FAQs Sponsors and their supporting Recognized Experts establish basic TQP qualification completion using Familiarity Level of Knowledge, Working Level of Knowledge, or a Demonstration of Ability. If a FAQs Sponsor/Recognized Expert Team determines level of knowledge beyond Working Level of Knowledge is required for some functional area tasks in accordance with the associated FAQs Job Task Analysis, that FAQs Sponsor should establish a "Master" TQP level qualification separate and distinct within that FAQs for a secondary or higher TQP qualification level. Supervisors and FTCP Agents identify TQP participation based on the duties and responsibilities of the position description, and would also be responsible to determine which TQP participants should achieve levels of qualification beyond basic TQP qualification.

- c. Modify the FAQs expert-level definition to read "**Expert level** is defined as a comprehensive, intensive knowledge of the subject or process sufficient to provide interpretation or policy guidance."

Sites have expressed concern over qualifying entry-level employees to FAQs containing expert-level knowledge requirements. Many organizations have adopted a tiered qualification approach. The US Air Force uses a Basic, Senior, and Master skill level approach; trade unions use an Apprentice, Journeyman, Master approach; and DOE is pursuing a five-level approach of Awareness, Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, and Expert for all DOE occupational series. If "c" is selected, provisional qualification should be explored.

DISSENTING OPINION(S): None known.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION(S): The qualification progression team recommends the FTC Panel vote to either:

- a. Retain the FAQs expert-level definition as written.
- b. Delete all reference to expert-level knowledge requirements in FAQs. If option "b" is selected, the FTC Panel should direct modification of the FAQs template to reflect the decision, and request any needed page changes to current FAQs. The FTCP Chair will request FAQs Sponsors and their supporting Recognized Experts establish basic TQP qualification completion using Familiarity Level of Knowledge, Working Level of Knowledge, or a Demonstration of Ability. If a FAQs Sponsor/Recognized Expert Team determines level of knowledge beyond Working Level of

Knowledge is required for some functional area tasks in accordance with the associated FAQs Job Task Analysis, that FAQs Sponsor should establish a "Master" TQP level qualification separately within that FAQs for a secondary or higher TQP qualification level. Supervisors and FTCP Agents identify TQP participation based on the duties and responsibilities of the position description, and would also be responsible to determine which TQP participants should achieve levels of qualification beyond basic TQP qualification.

- c. Modify the FAQs expert-level definition to read "Expert level is defined as a comprehensive, intensive knowledge of the subject or process sufficient to provide interpretation or policy guidance."

If option "c" is selected, the team recommends modification of the FAQs template to reflect the decision, a page change to current FAQss, and establishment of a policy for entry-level employees that would allow a provisional qualification.

DECISION: b, with the path forward as identified above.

DISPOSITION:

SIGNATURE:


7.2.12