

(2) *Application of safe-harbor testing method to qualified offset arrangements.* A defined benefit plan that is part of a qualified offset arrangement as defined in section 1116(f)(5) of the Tax Reform Act of 1986, Public Law No. 99-514, is deemed to satisfy the requirements of paragraph (d)(1)(vi) and (vii) of this section, if the only defined contribution plans included in the qualified offset arrangement are section 401(k) plans, section 401(m) plans, or both, and the defined benefit plan would satisfy the requirements of paragraph (d)(1)(vi) of this section assuming the elective contributions for each employee under the defined contribution plan were the same (either as a dollar amount or as a percentage of compensation) for all plan years since the establishment of the plan.

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§ 1.401(a)(4)-9 Plan aggregation and restructuring.

(a) *Introduction.* Two or more plans that are permissively aggregated and treated as a single plan under §§ 1.410(b)-7(d) must also be treated as a single plan for purposes of section 401(a)(4). See § 1.401(a)(4)-12 (definition of plan). An aggregated plan is generally tested under the same rules applicable to single plans. Paragraph (b) of this section, however, provides special rules for determining whether a plan that consists of one or more defined contribution plans and one or more defined benefit plans (a DB/DC plan) satisfies section 401(a)(4) with respect to the amount of employer-provided benefits and the availability of benefits, rights, and features. Paragraph (c) of this section provides rules allowing a plan to be treated as consisting of separate component plans and allowing the component plans to be tested separately under section 401(a)(4).

(b) *Application of nondiscrimination requirements to DB/DC plans—(1) General rule.* Except as provided in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, whether a DB/DC plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) is determined using the same rules applicable

to a single plan. In addition, paragraph (b)(3) of this section provides an optional rule for demonstrating non-discrimination in availability of benefits, rights, and features provided under a DB/DC plan.

(2) *Special rules for demonstrating non-discrimination in amount of contributions or benefits—(i) Application of general tests.* A DB/DC plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) with respect to the amount of contributions or benefits for a plan year if it would satisfy § 1.401(a)(4)-3(c)(1) (without regard to the special rule in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(c)(3)) for the plan year if an employee's aggregate normal and most valuable allocation rates, as determined under paragraph (b)(2)(ii)(A) of this section, or an employee's aggregate normal and most valuable accrual rates, as determined under paragraph (b)(2)(ii)(B) of this section, were substituted for each employee's normal and most valuable accrual rates, respectively, in the determination of rate groups.

(ii) *Determination of aggregate rates—(A) Aggregate allocation rates.* An employee's aggregate normal and most valuable allocation rates are determined by treating all defined contribution plans that are part of the DB/DC plan as a single plan, and all defined benefit plans that are part of the DB/DC plan as a separate single plan; and determining an allocation rate and equivalent normal and most valuable allocation rates for the employee under each plan under §§ 1.401(a)(4)-2(c)(2) and 1.401(a)(4)-8(c)(2), respectively. The employee's aggregate normal allocation rate is the sum of the employee's allocation rate and equivalent normal allocation rate determined in this manner, and the employee's aggregate most valuable allocation rate is the sum of the employee's allocation rate and equivalent most valuable allocation rate determined in this manner.

(B) *Aggregate accrual rates.* An employee's aggregate normal and most valuable accrual rates are determined by treating all defined contribution plans that are part of the DB/DC plan as a single plan, and all defined benefit plans that are part of the DB/DC plan as a separate single plan; and determining an equivalent accrual rate and normal and most valuable accrual

rates for the employee under each plan under §§ 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(2) and 1.401(a)(4)-3(d), respectively. The employee's aggregate normal accrual rate is the sum of the employee's equivalent accrual rate and the normal accrual rate determined in this manner, and the employee's aggregate most valuable accrual rate is the sum of the employee's equivalent accrual rate and most valuable accrual rate determined in this manner.

(iii) *Options applied on an aggregate basis.* The optional rules in § 1.401(a)(4)-2(c)(2)(iv) (imputation of permitted disparity) and (v) (grouping of rates) may not be used to determine an employee's allocation or equivalent allocation rate, but may be applied to determine an employee's aggregate normal and most valuable allocation rates by substituting those rates (determined without regard to the option) for the employee's allocation rate in that section where appropriate. The optional rules in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(d)(3) (e.g., imputation of permitted disparity) may not be used to determine an employee's accrual or equivalent accrual rate, but may be applied to determine an employee's aggregate normal and most valuable accrual rate by substituting those rates (determined without regard to the option) for the employee's normal and most valuable accrual rates, respectively, in that section where appropriate.

(iv) *Consistency rule—(A) General rule.* Aggregate normal and most valuable allocation rates and aggregate normal and most valuable accrual rates must be determined in a consistent manner for all employees for the plan year. Thus, for example, the same measurement periods and interest rates must be used, and any available options must be applied consistently, if at all, for the entire DB/DC plan. Consequently, options that are not permitted to be used under § 1.401(a)(4)-8 in cross-testing a defined contribution plan or a defined benefit plan (such as measurement periods that include future periods, non-standard interest rates, the option to disregard compensation adjustments described in § 1.401(a)(4)-13(d), or the option to disregard plan provisions providing for actuarial increases after normal retire-

ment age under § 1.401(a)(4)-3(f)(3)) may not be used in testing a DB/DC plan on either a benefits or contributions basis, because their use would inevitably result in inconsistent determinations under the defined contribution and defined benefit portions of the plan.

(B) *Exception for section 415 alternative.* A DB/DC plan does not fail to satisfy the consistency rule in paragraph (b)(2)(iv)(A) of this section merely because the limitations under section 415 are not taken into account, or may not be taken into account, under § 1.401(a)(4)-3(d)(2)(ii)(B) in determining employees' accrual or equivalent allocation rates under the defined benefit portion of the plan, even though those limitations are applied in determining employees' allocation and equivalent accrual rates under the defined contribution portion of the plan.

(v) *Eligibility for testing on a benefits basis—(A) General rule.* For plan years beginning on or after January 1, 2002, unless, for the plan year, a DB/DC plan is primarily defined benefit in character (within the meaning of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(B) of this section) or consists of broadly available separate plans (within the meaning of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(C) of this section), the DB/DC plan must satisfy the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section for the plan year in order to be permitted to demonstrate satisfaction of the non-discrimination in amount requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2) on the basis of benefits.

(B) *Primarily defined benefit in character.* A DB/DC plan is primarily defined benefit in character if, for more than 50% of the NHCEs benefitting under the plan, the normal accrual rate for the NHCE attributable to benefits provided under defined benefit plans that are part of the DB/DC plan exceeds the equivalent accrual rate for the NHCE attributable to contributions under defined contribution plans that are part of the DB/DC plan.

(C) *Broadly available separate plans.* A DB/DC plan consists of broadly available separate plans if the defined contribution plan and the defined benefit plan that are part of the DB/DC plan each would satisfy the requirements of

section 410(b) and the nondiscrimination in amount requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2) if each plan were tested separately and assuming that the average benefit percentage test of § 1.410(b)-5 were satisfied. For this purpose, all defined contribution plans that are part of the DB/DC plan are treated as a single defined contribution plan and all defined benefit plans that are part of the DB/DC plan are treated as a single defined benefit plan. In addition, if permitted disparity is used for an employee for purposes of satisfying the separate testing requirement of this paragraph (b)(2)(v)(C) for plans of one type, it may not be used in satisfying the separate testing requirement for plans of the other type for the employee.

(D) *Minimum aggregate allocation gateway—(1) General rule.* A DB/DC plan satisfies the minimum aggregate allocation gateway if each NHCE has an aggregate normal allocation rate that is at least one third of the aggregate normal allocation rate of the HCE with the highest such rate (HCE rate), or, if less, 5% of the NHCE's compensation, provided that the HCE rate does not exceed 25% of compensation. If the HCE rate exceeds 25% of compensation, then the aggregate normal allocation rate for each NHCE must be at least 5% increased by one percentage point for each 5-percentage-point increment (or portion thereof) by which the HCE rate exceeds 25% (e.g., the NHCE minimum is 6% for an HCE rate that exceeds 25% but not 30%, and 7% for an HCE rate that exceeds 30% but not 35%).

(2) *Deemed satisfaction.* A plan is deemed to satisfy the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of this paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) if the aggregate normal allocation rate for each NHCE is at least 7½% of the NHCE's compensation within the meaning of section 415(c)(3), measured over a period of time permitted under the definition of plan year compensation.

(3) *Averaging of equivalent allocation rates for NHCEs.* For purposes of this paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D), a plan is permitted to treat each NHCE who benefits under the defined benefit plan as having an equivalent normal allocation rate equal to the average of the equivalent normal allocation rates under the

defined benefit plan for all NHCEs benefiting under that plan.

(E) *Determination of rates.* For purposes of this paragraph (b)(2)(v), the normal accrual rate and the equivalent normal allocation rate attributable to defined benefit plans, the equivalent accrual rate attributable to defined contribution plans, and the aggregate normal allocation rate are determined under paragraph (b)(2)(ii) of this section, but without taking into account the imputation of permitted disparity under § 1.401(a)(4)-7, except as otherwise permitted under paragraph (b)(2)(v)(C) of this section.

(F) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the application of this paragraph (b)(2)(v):

Example 1. (i) Employer A maintains Plan M, a defined benefit plan, and Plan N, a defined contribution plan. All HCEs of Employer A are covered by Plan M (at a 1% accrual rate), but are not covered by Plan N. All NHCEs of Employer A are covered by Plan N (at a 3% allocation rate), but are not covered by Plan M. Because Plan M does not satisfy section 410(b) standing alone, Plans M and N are aggregated for purposes of satisfying sections 410(b) and 401(a)(4).

(ii) Because none of the NHCEs participate in the defined benefit plan, the aggregated DB/DC plan is not primarily defined benefit in character within the meaning of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(B) of this section nor does it consist of broadly available separate plans within the meaning of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(C) of this section. Accordingly, the aggregated Plan M and Plan N must satisfy the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section in order to be permitted to demonstrate satisfaction of the nondiscrimination in amount requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2) on the basis of benefits.

Example 2. (i) Employer B maintains Plan O, a defined benefit plan, and Plan P, a defined contribution plan. All of the six employees of Employer B are covered under both Plan O and Plan P. Under Plan O, all employees have a uniform normal accrual rate of 1% of compensation. Under Plan P, Employees A and B, who are HCEs, receive an allocation rate of 15%, and participants C, D, E and F, who are NHCEs, receive an allocation rate of 3%. Employer B aggregates Plans O and P for purposes of satisfying sections 410(b) and 401(a)(4). The equivalent normal allocation and normal accrual rates under Plans O and P are as follows:

Employee	Equivalent normal allocation rates for the 1% accrual under plan O (defined benefit plan) (in percent)	Equivalent normal accrual rates for the 15%/3% allocation under plan P (defined contribution plan) (in percent)
HCE A (age 55)	3.93	3.82
HCE B (age 50)	2.61	5.74
C (age 60)	5.91	.51
D (age 45)	1.74	1.73
E (age 35)77	3.90
F (age 25)34	8.82

(i) Although all of the NHCEs benefit under Plan O (the defined benefit plan), the aggregated DB/DC plan is not primarily defined benefit in character because the normal accrual rate attributable to defined benefit plans (which is 1% for each of the NHCEs) is greater than the equivalent accrual rate under defined contribution plans only for Employee C. In addition, because the 15% allocation rate is available only to HCEs, the defined contribution plan cannot satisfy the requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-2 and does not have broadly available allocation rates within the meaning of § 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(1)(iii). Further, the defined contribution plan does not satisfy the minimum allocation gateway of § 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(1)(vi) (3% is less than 1/3 of the 15% HCE rate). Therefore, the defined contribution plan within the DB/DC plan cannot separately satisfy § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2) and does not constitute a broadly available separate plan within the meaning of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(C) of this section. Accordingly, the aggregated plans are permitted to demonstrate satisfaction of the nondiscrimination in amounts requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2) on the basis of benefits only if the aggregated plans satisfy the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section.

(iii) Employee A has an aggregate normal allocation rate of 18.93% under the aggregated plans (3.93% from Plan O plus 15% from Plan P), which is the highest aggregate normal allocation rate for any HCE under the plans. Employee F has an aggregate normal allocation rate of 3.34% under the aggregated plans (.34% from Plan O plus 3% from Plan P) which is less than the 5% aggregate normal allocation rate that Employee F would be required to have to satisfy the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section.

(iv) However, for purposes of satisfying the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section, Employer B is permitted to treat each NHCE who benefits under Plan O (the defined benefit plan) as having an equivalent allocation rate equal to the average of the equivalent allocation rates under Plan O for all NHCEs

benefitting under that plan. The average of the equivalent allocation rates for all of the NHCEs under Plan O is 2.19% (the sum of 5.91%, 1.74%, .77%, and .34%, divided by 4). Accordingly, Employer B is permitted to treat all of the NHCEs as having an equivalent allocation rate attributable to Plan O equal to 2.19%. Thus, all of the NHCEs can be treated as having an aggregate normal allocation rate of 5.19% for this purpose (3% from the defined contribution plan and 2.19% from the defined benefit plan) and the aggregated DB/DC plan satisfies the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section.

(3) *Optional rules for demonstrating nondiscrimination in availability of certain benefits, rights, and features*—(i) *Current availability.* A DB/DC plan is deemed to satisfy § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b)(1) with respect to the current availability of a benefit, right, or feature other than a single sum benefit, loan, ancillary benefit, or benefit commencement date (including the availability of in-service withdrawals), that is provided under only one type of plan (defined benefit or defined contribution) included in the DB/DC plan, if the benefit, right, or feature is currently available to all NHCEs in all plans of the same type as the plan under which it is provided.

(ii) *Effective availability.* The fact that it may be difficult or impossible to provide a benefit, right, or feature described in paragraph (b)(3)(i) of this section under a plan of a different type than the plan or plans under which it is provided is one of the factors taken into account in determining whether the plan satisfies the effective availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(c)(1).

(c) *Plan restructuring*—(1) *General rule.* A plan may be treated, in accordance with this paragraph (c), as consisting of two or more component plans for purposes of determining whether the plan satisfies section 401(a)(4). If each of the component plans of a plan satisfies all of the requirements of sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b) as if it were a separate plan, then the plan is treated as satisfying section 401(a)(4).

(2) *Identification of component plans.* A plan may be restructured into component plans, each consisting of all the allocations, accruals, and other benefits, rights, and features provided to a

selected group of employees. The employer may select the group of employees used for this purpose in any manner, and the composition of the groups may be changed from plan year to plan year. Every employee must be included in one and only one component plan under the same plan for a plan year.

(3) *Satisfaction of section 401(a)(4) by a component plan*—(i) *General rule.* The rules applicable in determining whether a component plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) are the same as those applicable to a plan. Thus, for this purpose, any reference to a plan in section 401(a)(4) and the regulations thereunder (other than this paragraph (c)) is interpreted as a reference to a component plan. As is true for a plan, whether a component plan satisfies the uniformity and other requirements applicable to safe harbor plans under §§ 1.401(a)(4)-2(b) and 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) is determined on a design basis. Thus, for example, plan provisions are not disregarded merely because they do not currently apply to employees in the component plan if they will apply to those employees as a result of the mere passage of time.

(ii) *Restructuring not available for certain testing purposes.* The safe harbor in § 1.401(a)(4)-2(b)(3) for plans with uniform points allocation formulas is not available in testing (and thus cannot be satisfied by) contributions under a component plan. Similarly, component plans cannot be used for purposes of determining whether a plan provides broadly available allocation rates (as defined in § 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(1)(iii)), determining whether a plan has a gradual age or service schedule (as defined in § 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(1)(iv)), determining whether a plan has allocation rates that are based on a uniform target benefit allocation (as defined in § 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(1)(v)), or determining whether a plan is primarily defined benefit in character or consists of broadly available separate plans (as defined in paragraphs (b)(2)(v)(B) and (C) of this section). In addition, the minimum allocation gateway of § 1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(1)(vi) and the minimum aggregate allocation gateway of paragraph (b)(2)(v)(D) of this section cannot be satisfied on the basis of component plans. See §§ 1.401(k)-1(b)(3)(iii) and

1.401(m)-1(b)(3)(iii) for rules regarding the inapplicability of restructuring to section 401(k) plans and section 401(m) plans.

(4) *Satisfaction of section 410(b) by a component plan*—(i) *General rule.* The rules applicable in determining whether a component plan satisfies section 410(b) are generally the same as those applicable to a plan. However, a component plan is deemed to satisfy the average benefit percentage test of § 1.410(b)-5 if the plan of which it is a part satisfies § 1.410(b)-5 (without regard to § 1.410(b)-5(f)). In the case of a component plan that is part of a plan that relies on § 1.410(b)-5(f) to satisfy the average benefit percentage test, the component plan is deemed to satisfy the average benefit percentage test only if the component plan separately satisfies § 1.410(b)-5(f). In addition, all component plans of a plan are deemed to satisfy the average benefit percentage test if the plan makes an early retirement window benefit (within the meaning of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(f)(4)(iii)) currently available (within the meaning of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(f)(4)(ii)(A)) to a group of employees that satisfies section 410(b) (without regard to the average benefit percentage test), and if it would not be necessary for the plan or any rate group or component plan of the plan to satisfy that test in order for the plan to satisfy sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b) in the absence of the early retirement window benefit.

(ii) *Relationship to satisfaction of section 410(b) by the plan.* Satisfaction of section 410(b) by a component plan is relevant solely for purposes of determining whether the plan of which it is a part satisfies section 401(a)(4), and not for purposes of determining whether the plan satisfies section 410(b) itself. The plan must still independently satisfy section 410(b) in order to be a qualified plan. Similarly, satisfaction of section 410(b) by a plan is relevant solely for purposes of determining whether the plan, and not the component plan, satisfies section 410(b). Thus, for example, a component plan that does not satisfy the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2) must still satisfy the average benefit test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(3), even though the plan

of which it is a part satisfies the ratio percentage test.

(5) *Effect of restructuring under other sections.* The restructuring rules provided in this paragraph (c) apply solely for purposes of sections 401(a)(4) and 401(l), and those portions of sections 410(b), 414(s), and any other provisions that are specifically applicable in determining whether the requirements of section 401(a)(4) are satisfied. Thus, for example, a component plan is not treated as a separate plan under section 401(a)(26).

(6) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (c):

Example 1. Employer X maintains a defined benefit plan. The plan provides a normal retirement benefit equal to 1.0 percent of average annual compensation times years of service to employees at Plant S, and 1.5 percent of average annual compensation times years of service to employees at Plant T. Under paragraph (c)(2) of this section, the plan may be treated as consisting of two component defined benefit plans, one providing retirement benefits equal to 1.0 percent of average annual compensation times years of service to the employees at Plant S, and another providing benefits equal to 1.5 percent of average annual compensation times years of service to employees at Plant T. If each component plan satisfies sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b) as if it were a separate plan under the rules of this paragraph (c), then the entire plan satisfies section 401(a)(4).

Example 2. (a) Employer Y maintains Plan A, a defined benefit plan, for its Employees M, N, O, P, Q, and R. Plan A provides benefits under a uniform formula that satisfies the requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-3 (b)(2) and (b)(3) before it is amended on February 14, 1994. The amendment provides an early retirement window benefit that is a subsidized optional form of benefit under § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(2)(iii) and that is available on the same terms to all employees who satisfy the eligibility requirements for the window. The early retirement window benefit is available only to employees who retire between June 1, 1994, and November 30, 1994.

(b) Assume that Employees M, N, and O will be eligible to receive the window benefit by the end of the window period and Employees P, Q, and R will not. Because substantially all employees will not satisfy the eligibility requirements for the early retirement window benefit by the close of the early retirement window benefit period, Plan A fails to satisfy the uniform subsidies requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(2)(iii). See § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(2)(vi), *Example 6.*

(c) Under paragraph (c)(2) of this section, Employees M, N, O, P, Q, and R may be grouped into two component plans, one consisting of Employees M, N, and O, and all their accruals and other benefits, rights, and features under the plan (including the early retirement window benefit), and another consisting of Employees P, Q, and R, and all their accruals and other benefits, rights, and features under the plan. Each of the component plans identified in this manner satisfies the uniform subsidies requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(2)(iii), and thus satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b). The entire plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) under the rules of this paragraph (c), if each of these component plans also satisfies section 410(b) as if it were a separate plan (including, if applicable, the reasonable classification requirement of § 1.410(b)-4(b), and taking into account the special rule of paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section that forgives the average benefit percentage test in certain situations in which the average benefit percentage test would be required solely as a result of the early retirement window benefit).

Example 3. (a) Employer Z maintains Plan B, a defined benefit plan with a benefit formula that provides two percent of average annual compensation for each year of service up to 20 to each employee. Assume that Plan B would satisfy the fractional accrual rule safe harbor in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4), except that some employees accrue a portion of their normal retirement benefit in the current plan year that is more than one-third larger than the portion of the same benefit accrued by other employees for the current plan year, and the plan therefore fails to satisfy the one-third-larger requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4)(i)(C)(I).

(b) Employer Z restructures Plan B into two plans, one covering employees with 30 years or less of service at normal retirement age, and the other covering all other employees. Each component plan would separately satisfy the one-third-larger requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4)(i)(C)(I) if the only employees taken into account were those employees included in the component plan in the current plan year. Under paragraph (c)(3)(i) of this section and § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4)(i)(C)(I), however, the component plans do not satisfy the one-third-larger requirement because the safe harbor determination is made taking into account the effect of the plan benefit formula on any potential employee in the component plan (other than employees with more than 33 years of service at normal retirement age), and not just those employees included in the component plan in the current plan year.

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