paragraph (c) of this section, a plan that is subject to this section must benefit at least the lesser of:

(1) 50 former employees of the employer, or

(2) 40 percent of the former employees of the employer.

(c) *Special rule.* A plan satisfies the minimum participation rule in paragraph (b) of this section if the plan benefits at least five former employees, and if either:

(1) More than 95 percent of all former employees with vested accrued benefits under the plan benefit under the plan for the plan year, or

(2) At least 60 percent of the former employees who benefit under the plan for the plan year are nonhighly compensated former employees.

(d) *Excludable former employees*—(1) *General rule.* Whether a former employee is an excludable former employee for purposes of this section is determined under §1.401(a)(26)–6(c).

(2) *Exception.* Solely for purposes of paragraph (c) of this section, the rule in §1.401(a)(26)–6(c)(4) (regarding vested accrued benefits eligible for mandatory distribution) does not apply to any former employee having a vested accrued benefit. Thus, a former employee who has a vested accrued benefit is not an excludable former employee merely because that vested accrued benefit does not exceed the cash-out limit in effect under §1.411(a)–11(c)(3)(ii).

[T.D. 8375, 56 FR 63416, Dec. 4, 1991, as amended by T.D. 8794, 63 FR 70338, Dec. 21, 1998; T.D. 8891, 65 FR 44682, July 19, 2000]

§1.401(a)(26)–5 Employees who benefit under a plan.

(a) *Employees benefiting under a plan*—(1) *In general.* Except as provided in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, an employee is treated as benefiting under a plan for a plan year if and only if, for that plan year, the employee would be treated as benefiting under the provisions of §1.410(b)–3(a), without regard to §1.410(b)–3(a)(iv).

(2) *Sequential or concurrent benefit offset arrangements*—(i) *In general.* An employee is treated as accruing a benefit under a plan that includes an offset or reduction of benefits that satisfies either paragraph (a)(2)(ii) or (a)(2)(iii) of this section if either the employee accrues a benefit under the plan for the year, or the employee would have accrued a benefit if the offset or reduction portion of the benefit formula were disregarded. In addition, an employee is treated as accruing a meaningful benefit for purposes of prior benefit structure testing under §1.401(a)(26)–3 if the employee would have accrued a meaningful benefit if the offset or reduction portion of the benefit formula were disregarded.

(ii) *Offset by sequential or grandfathered benefits.* An offset or reduction of benefits under a defined benefit plan satisfies this paragraph (a)(2) if the benefit formula provides that an employee will not accrue additional benefits under the current portion of the benefit formula until the employee has accrued, under such portion, a benefit in excess of such employee's benefit under one or more formulas in effect for prior years that are based wholly on prior years of service. The prior benefit may have accrued under the same or a separate plan, may be provided under the same or a separate plan and may relate to service with the same or previous employers. Benefits will not fail to be treated as based wholly on prior years if they are based, directly or indirectly, on compensation earned after such prior years (including compensation earned in the current year), if they are adjusted to reflect increases in the section 415 limitations, or if they are increased to provide an ad hoc cost of living adjustment designed to adjust, in whole or in part, for inflation. Furthermore, benefits do not fail to be treated as based wholly on prior years merely because the benefits (e.g., early retirement benefits) are subject to an age or years-of-service condition and, in applying the condition or conditions, the current and prior years are taken into account.

(iii) *Concurrent benefit offset arrangements*—(A) *General rule.* An offset or reduction of benefits under a defined benefit plan satisfies the requirements of this paragraph (a)(2)(iii) if the benefit formula provides a benefit that is offset or reduced by contributions or benefits under another plan that is maintained by the same employer and the following additional requirements are met:

(*1*) The contributions or benefits under a plan that are used to offset or reduce the benefits under the positive portion of the fomula being tested accrued under such other plan;

(*2*) The employees who benefit under the formula being tested also benefit under the other plan on a reasonable and uniform basis; and

(*3*) The contributions or benefits under the plan that are used to offset or reduce the benefits under the formula being tested are not used to offset or reduce that employee's benefits under any other plan or any other formula.

(B) *Special rules for certain section 414(n) employer-recipients.* The same employer requirement in the concurrent benefit offset rule in paragraph (a)(2)(iii)(A) of this section is waived for certain section 414(n) employer-recipients. Under this exception, an employer-recipient (within the meaning of sections 414 (n) and (o)) may treat contributions or benefits under a plan maintained by a leasing organization as contributions or benefits accrued under the recipient organization plan provided the following requirements are met: the employer-recipient maintains a plan covering leased employees (which employees are treated as employees of the employer-recipient within the meaning of sections 414(n)(2) and 414(o)(2)); the leased employees are also covered under a plan maintained by the leasing organization; and contributions or benefits under the plan maintained by the employer-recipient are offset or reduced by the contributions or benefits under the leasing organization plan that are attributable to service with the recipient organization. Also, for purposes of the benefiting condition requirement in paragraph (a)(2)(iii)(A)(*2*) of this section, the employees of the employer-recipient who are not leased from the leasing organization are not required to benefit under the plan of the leasing organization.

(b) *Former employees benefiting under a plan.* A former employee is treated as benefiting for a plan year if and only if the former employee would be treated as benetiting under the rules in §1.410(b)–3(b).

[T.D. 8375, 56 FR 63416, Dec. 4, 1991]

§1.401(a)(26)–6 Excludable employees.

(a) *In general.* For purposes of applying section 401(a)(26) with respect to either employees, former employees, or both employees and former employees, as applicable, all employees other than excludable employees described in paragraph (b) of this section, all former employees other than excludable former employees described in paragraph (c) of this section, or both, as the case may be, must be taken into account. Except as specifically provided otherwise in this section, the rules of this section are applied by reference only to the particular plan and must be applied on a uniform and consistent basis.

(b) *Excludable employees.* An employee is an excludable employee if the employee is covered by one or more of the following exclusions:

(1) *Minimum age and service exclusions*—(i) *In general.* If a plan applies minimum age and service eligibility conditions permissible under section 410(a)(1) and excludes all employees who do not meet those conditions from benefiting under the plan, tbn all employees who fail to satisfy those conditions may be treated as excludable employees with respect to that plan. An employee is treated as meeting the age and service requirements on the date any employee with the same age and service would be eligible to commence participation in the plan, as provided in section 410(b)(4)(C).

(ii) *Plans benefiting otherwise excludable employees.* An employer may treat a plan benefiting otherwise excludable employees as two separate plans, one for the otherwise excludable employees and one for the other employees benefiting under the plan. The effect of this rule is that employees who would be excludable under paragraph (b)(1) of this section (applied without regard to section 410(a)(1)(B)), but for the fact that the plan does not apply the greatest permissible minimum age and service conditions, may be treated as excludable employees with respect to the plan. This treatment is only available if each of the following conditions is satisfied:

(A) The plan under which the otherwise excludable employees benefit also