



International Board Certified Lactation Consultant® (IBCLC®) 2023 Standard Setting Report Executive Summary

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Overview

This report documents the procedures and results of the Standard Setting Study (also known as a cut score study) conducted by ACS Ventures, LLC (ACS) on behalf of the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant® (IBCLC®) certification exam. The study was conducted on April 19, 2023.

Standard Setting is an official research study conducted by, or on behalf of, a testing organization to determine the minimum passing score (the passing standard) for their test. To be legally defensible and meet psychometrically recognized standards (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014; National Commission of Certifying Agencies, 2016), a passing standard must be empirically justified and cannot be arbitrarily determined. To determine an empirically justified passing standard, a standard setting study is conducted to determine what score best differentiates qualified from unqualified candidates.

The IBCLC standard setting process was implemented with a committee of subject matter experts (SMEs) who understand the content of the test and the performance of candidates. During the Standard Setting process, participants determined the recommended passing standard by engaging in a structured conversation that includes discussion of “minimally qualified” candidates (those with the minimum knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be certified as an IBCLC), specific test items, and other relevant specifications about the exam.



Standard Setting Process

The 2023 standard setting was conducted for the IBCLC program given the implementation of the new detailed content outline (DCO). The first test forms from this DCO were administered in March of 2023 and the standard setting was conducted immediately following this administration to set the passing standard that would be applied to this, and future, test forms.

Method

The standard setting was conducted following the Bookmark procedure (Mitzel et al., 2001) so that subject matter expert panelists could review a select set of items presented in order of difficulty based on how candidates performed on each item. The Bookmark method is a well-established standard setting method with research and practical applications supporting its use.

Panelists

There were nine SMEs on the standard setting committee who were selected to represent a range of backgrounds and types of experience. All were experienced professionals from six different countries.

Orientation and Setting Expectations

As a first step in the process, the panel discussed the concept of the qualified candidate who has the minimum knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be certified as an IBCLC (i.e., target candidate). Through this discussion, the panel established a common conceptual expectation for the passing standard.

Standard Setting Training and Judgments

The meeting facilitator proceeded to introduce the training for the Bookmark standard setting process, which would guide the panel's decision-making. Their task was to assess the ordered item booklet (OIB) and determine whether a qualified candidate (target candidate) would probably answer each item correctly, assigning either a "yes" or "no" rating.

Under the Bookmark method, the assumption was that panelists would consider the initial set of items as ones the qualified candidate (target candidate) would answer correctly. This method entailed a shift in ratings, moving from predominantly positive ("yes") ratings at the beginning of the OIB to mainly negative ("no") ratings toward the end. When panelists faced uncertainty, they had the option to use a "maybe" rating. Once all items had been rated, panelists would place a "bookmark" at the point where they perceived the shift occurring—where positive ("yes") ratings gave way to negative ("no") ratings.

Panelists initially made individual judgments, which were then amalgamated and discussed within the panel. Subsequently, they were given an opportunity for a second round of judgments, which culminated in the formulation of a recommendation to the IBCLC Commission. Their suggested cut scores were determined by two factors: (1) the point in the OIB where their judgments shifted from mostly "yes" to mostly "no" and (2) their estimation of how many items the qualified candidate (target candidate) would likely answer correctly, plus half of the items they believed the candidate might answer correctly.

Results

The judges' individual passing score estimates were combined, and the results indicated a recommended range of scores. This information was presented to the IBCLC Commission for final decision making.



Summary

The IBCLC Commission discussed the results of this study to determine the cut score to be used for the March 2023 form of the IBCLC examination. Following discussion, the Commission unanimously approved from within the recommended range the implementation of 129 as the raw cut score for the March 2023 form of the IBCLC examination.

The standard setting study documented in this report was conducted as a result of the use of the updated detailed content outline established on the basis of the international practice analysis study completed in 2021 and documented elsewhere. The raw cut score established for the March 2023 form of the IBCLC examination will serve as the new standard of competence until completion of the next practice analysis. More specifically, this standard will be statistically equated to future exam forms so that all candidates will be held to the same expectations to pass the exam.

