NCARB Live Follow-Up: Cut Score, Pass Rates, and Scoring

Watch the video on **YouTube**.

Michelle Cohn [00:00]: Hi, everyone. Thanks for checking out this video. We are going to answer a bunch of questions that we had received during a recent NCARB Live that we didn't have time to answer during the NCARB Live. And in this video, we're going to focus on questions about cut score, pass rates, exam scoring, and the like.

Michelle Cohn [00:19]: So starting us off here, our first question is:

How will exams taken between December 14th, the launch of online proctoring, and January 14th, a month later, be scored if a new cut score has to still be established?
So, that is a great question and really this is all about the cut score process. So, in that process, which we did a version of that as well, when we move from ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0, this is going to be a reduced process, but essentially it is still about making sure that the exam that we launched with the launch of online proctoring is equally difficult and scored in the same way as the exam that we're delivering today in test centers only.

So, in order to complete that cut score process, we need about 400 administrations per division. And so we're estimating, based on typical candidate testing volumes, that it will take about four weeks to gather enough data to be able to go through that cut score process and then begin releasing score reports. So, the answer is between December 14th and January 14th, your exams will not be scored. Once we complete that cut score process for each division at the time, then we will be able to process all of the scores, release the score reports for candidates who have tested so far. And then for that division, we'll move into our more normal process of releasing scores within a couple of days of testing.

Jared Zurn [01:50]: Okay. Our next question is:
Does the score report and delay apply to both in-person and online exams?
And the answer is yes it does. NCARB will be holding all score results, regardless of whether it's an on-site or an online exam. And then as that division is completed with the cut score process, all of those scores for that division will be released at one time.

Michelle Cohn [02:13]: All right.

Will exams taken between now and December 14th be affected by the cut score process?
No, they will not. So, any exam taken through the end of the day on December 13th would be scored based on our current scoring rules and you'll still receive provisional feedback in the test center. You'll get your official score report, like I said, within a couple of business days. And so those will not be affected. The cut score process only affects exams taken starting December 14th.

Jared Zurn [02:45]: Next question:

Will provisional feedback still be available after online proctoring launches?
And the answer is initially no, we will not be able to give provisional feedback in the test center because we don't know what the cut score is. So, we can't tell you how you did. And so during that period where we're holding results, there will be no provisional feedback in the test center. Once we release the scores for that division, we will enable provisional feedback in the test center. So, it is coming back. It just won't be in test centers for that period of time.

Michelle Cohn [03:19]: **What happens if you don't get enough test takers to make a new cut score?**
Well, then we will test a few more people until we got up to that 400 number. As I mentioned, we're estimating, and we'll take about four weeks based on typical candidate volumes. If we have not reached that 400-administration threshold for a particular division, then it might take a bit longer until we get to, again, about 400 candidates worth of data.

Jared Zurn [03:47]: And our next question says:

How many tests does NCARB need to establish a new cut score?
And as Michelle had mentioned, it's 400 administrations per division. And so again, that's the combination of people who are going into the test centers to test as well as those that are testing online. And based on current volumes for of how people have scheduled for December 14th on, we are on track to have these all done within that four-week timeframe where we will get the volume of candidates we need.

Michelle Cohn [04:16]: **Will score reports go back to normal timeframe after the cut scores are set?**
Yes they will. And so we had just mentioned, once the cut score is set for a division, then you will start seeing provisional feedback again at the test center or in your online proctor modality and you will start receiving your official score report within a couple of business days of testing.

Jared Zurn [04:37]: So, the next question, a little more complicated to answer. So, I'm going to warn you. It says:

If the number of items per division drops, because as NCARB has announced, we are decreasing the number of items per division, do we need to get more questions correct as a percentage of the total?
My answer is likely no. And the reason I say likely is because you are going to need to get less questions correct. Because if we currently are scoring you based on 100 operational items and in the future we're going to score you on 91 operational items, we're not going to expect you to get as many questions correct. As far as the actual percentage of questions you need to get correct, that can vary based on the version of the exam you take, we call it a form. And so if the

form of the exam you take happens to be more difficult, this has harder questions on it, your cut score will be lower than somebody else who gets a form of the same division that might have slightly easier questions on it. So, my answer is I think the percent of questions that you're going to need to get correct is going to pretty much stay the same. I don't see it going up or down dramatically. I can't give you a specific answer per your experience, because it really will depend on which form you take the moment you test.

Michelle Cohn [05:50]: Our next question:

Can you provide specifics on how the new cut score will compare to the existing cut score?
So, now this is going to relate back to some of what Jared just mentioned, which is the cut score varies a little bit between forms or versions of the exam. And that also holds true between the current tests that are in the test center right now, and the new tests that will launch starting December 14. The intent behind the cut score process is to maintain equal difficulty between all of these different forms. We do our best working with our psychometricians in our form assembly process to make sure the forms are all assembled to an equal level of difficulty.

But as Jared just mentioned that there might be a form where a couple of questions are a little bit more difficult or another form has a couple of questions that are a little bit easier. So, a cut score reflects that difference so that everyone is being scored on a level playing field. So, same thing. Going through this cut score process now ensures that candidates who are currently testing are still being graded to the same level of competency as candidates who will start testing after December 14.

Jared Zurn [07:07]: **So, the next question is: Why is NCARB launching the updates without already having a cut score?**
And the answer is because we really care about making sure that you get a fair assessment. It would be crazy for us. I will tell you, that would be crazy talk to say, "I'm going to set a cut score and then I'm going to turn on an exam and then I'm going to assess you based on that cut score." That would actually be unethical and unprofessional for us to do. So, that's why we're turning on the exam, we're holding scores, we're collecting real candidate data, and then we're using that real candidate data to help establish the cut score. That's what's going to allow us as an organization to make sure that the new cut score really is properly reflecting the level of difficulty of the items that are going to be assembled into those forms.

Michelle Cohn [07:54]: Our next question is:

What is the target cut score?
Well, I can't share that information with you in large part because it varies. There is no set cut score across every division of the ARE. And as Jared and I had both mentioned, even within one division, each form or version of that exam might have a slightly different cut score just to reflect the slight variance in levels of difficulty between those different forms. So, it's really best to approach that ARE as if every item counts. Do your best across the board, maximize your

scoring opportunities, get all of the points that you can without focusing on needing to get a certain number correct.

Jared Zurn [08:40]: Next, a two-part question:

Will the new cut score affect only online exams or in-person exams as well?
So, I'll answer that one first. The new cut score is going to affect all candidates on and after December 14th. Because the candidates testing on or after December 14th are all taking the same forms, whether you're online or whether you're onsite.

Jared Zurn [09:03]: And then it says:

Do you have a specific date when the cut score will be complete and that a candidate can count on the results being posted?
I fully expected that we're going to get some divisions done sooner than the four weeks. I think the other divisions are all going to be coming right up to about that four-week mark. PPD and PDD typically have had higher volumes of testing consistently since we've launched ARE 5.0. We expect to get those two done first, just looking at the volumes that are scheduled. PA, PjM, PcM, those are going to probably come in in the middle somewhere. And in all honesty, CE is always our lowest volume exam. And so that when we do expect to be last. NCARB will communicate with candidates as far as what's going on in the cut score process. So, as soon as we have enough data, we're going to let you know. That'll give you a timeline of when we expect to release a certain division. So, you'll get updates as we go throughout the cut score process.

Michelle Cohn [09:59]: **What kind of effect is the cut score process and likely to have on pass rates? Higher, lower, or the same?**
Well, hopefully if we've all done our jobs well and our psychometricians have done their job well, hopefully it doesn't affect pass rates. As we mentioned, the point of the cut score process is to make sure that the cut score really levels that playing field between the exam that we're currently delivering and the exam that we will be delivering, and between the form that I see in my online proctor test and the form that Jared sees in his test center test. So if anything, the cut score should ensure that we have leveled out that process. We wouldn't expect to see any significant impact on past rates just as a result of that cut score process itself.

Jared Zurn [10:49]: The next question, also about timing, says:

If we plan to test early next year, should we still expect to wait four weeks for our results?
Absolutely not. So, when we're saying four weeks, we're saying four weeks expected from the launch, which is in mid-December. So if you're testing in, let's say in very early 2021, you may wait two weeks. It may be even less than that.

Michelle Cohn [11:15]: Next question, again about pass rates:

Do you feel that these exam changes will raise the average pass rates of these exams?
Well, we already spoke specifically about the cut score process likely not having a significant impact on pass rates. As far as just overall exam changes, I don't know. That's an interesting question. Some candidates might feel more comfortable doing an online proctor test. Maybe if that helps ease the stress level for some candidates, allows them to test in an environment that's more comfortable for them, then they might be able to perform better on the exam. So perhaps that would then result in an increase in pass rates. We will just have to wait and see.

Jared Zurn [11:57]: Our next question says:

Are all items or questions still weighted equally?
Yes they are. So the scoring of the ARE about each question is worth one point. If it's an operational question, you can earn a point or not and that stays exactly the same.

Michelle Cohn [12:14]: **Does testing before the cut score is set put you at a disadvantage?**
So, I assume this question is really asking about that four-week period from December 14th to about the middle of January. And no, there would be no disadvantage that you would incur there. Again, it's the same test that will be delivered to you during the cut score process versus after the cut score is set. So, no change in what you'll be seeing at the test center or in your online proctored delivery. I think the only thing it would affect you as a candidate is you just need to wait longer before you get your score report.

Jared Zurn [12:47]: So, our next question is one we've sort of answered earlier, which is:

What happens if you don't get the pool of 400 people for the new cut score?
And as Michelle had mentioned, we will get the 400 people because it may just take a little bit longer. So again, we're anticipating four weeks, again, we're already watching volumes of who has what exams scheduled when, we're still comfortable with getting the 400 results per division within the four-week timeframe. In reality, if there's a big shift and something happens and all of a sudden it takes longer, then unfortunately NCARB will let you know that, that it's just going to have to take longer.

Michelle Cohn [13:24]: Our next question:

What is preventing immediate pass-fail results as soon as you finish the test versus provisional likely results?
So of course, this is what we have today in the test center. And this is what we would have again, after we get through that cut score process. We'd be able to resume provisional feedback. The reason that it's provisional is for a couple of reasons. From a just security standpoint, we do do some forensic analysis on the results before we can confirm them as accurate. And that is just looking at any anomalies that might come up from candidates in the test center or in online proctoring once that launches. Just to make sure that there's nothing, I'll

be non-scientific, that there's nothing fishy happening right there. So, that slight delay gives us that time to complete any backend analysis. The other thing to remember is that your score report is really coming from your licensing board. And so providing you the provisional feedback in the test center gives you that early preview of what you can expect to see. But a lot of our licensing boards do like to be able to view those results before they then release them to you as a candidate.

Jared Zurn [14:36]: So, our next question is:

Does the cut score depend on how many total questions a candidate gets right or how many questions a candidate gets right per section of the exam?
And so your cut score as a candidate is a total cut score. So again, if we use something like PPD as an example, 91 potential points available on that exam because you have 91 operational items. The cut score is going to be based off of 91 items. It's not based on the section. So, if you were to get every question wrong in one of the small sections on that exam, but get all the other questions right, you can still pass. So, don't think about passing a section of a division. You pass the division as a whole.

Michelle Cohn [15:23]: **Do NCARB psychometricians do statistical analysis of the validity of questions? For example, if a high percentage of candidates get an item wrong, that would indicate a problem with that question, wouldn't it?**
Yes, absolutely. We do a lot of statistical analysis on the various questions and this ongoing data collection and analysis is really what helps us ensure that the exam remains a good assessment. That starts from really early in the process with pre-test questions. Some of you have probably read blogs or seen our other videos where we talk about pre-test questions, are questions that have just been written and they are on every form that you will see in your testing experience and they do not count towards your score. So, when we talk about every item is worth one point, well, that's true of all the operational items. But there are a number of items on every form that are worth zero points. And really, it's because we're trying them out.

And so that's where the statistical analysis begins is we're gathering data on those questions. You won't know which questions those are, they are sprinkled throughout your exam. And so that's how we can ensure that candidates are attempting all of those questions. So, we're able to gather enough data on the pre-test questions and see, if they are good questions, then they will move into a scored status. Or if they're not good questions, then they just get retired. And then the next year we have a new batch of pre-test questions that we're trying out. Once a question is moved into a scored status, we are still collecting data on it. And that is an ongoing process where we review the statistics we're getting on existing score items. In a lot of cases, we can see that those items continue to perform well and so we continue to keep them on the exam.

In other cases, we might see that an item performed well when it was first turned into a scored item, and then maybe over time it performs less well and we start seeing the data start to

change. And that indicates to us, you know what? This question, maybe it's not relevant anymore. Maybe just candidates understanding of this topic has shifted. Maybe the practice of architecture has shifted and this material doesn't really belong on the exam anymore. So, we can use that data collection to point to potential issues to really ensure that items that are not performing well are retired off of the exam.

Jared Zurn [17:47]: So our next question says:

So if each ARE operational question is worth one point towards your cut score, are there negative point values assigned for incorrect operational questions?
The answer there is no, there is not. So, either it's a one or a zero, right? So, you're either getting the question correct and you get one point, if it's incorrect in any way, it's a zero. There's no negative point values. So again, it's always in your best interest as a candidate to just guess. If you have no idea, get down to it, process of elimination, probably eliminate a couple of those distractors that you think there's no way it's that one or that one, and then just take your best guess. Because there's no harm in guessing and guessing incorrectly.

Michelle Cohn [18:32]: Our next question:

ARE pass rates are as low as 42%. Previous iterations of the exam had passed rates around 70%. Can you address why that is and how you're addressing it?
Okay, so this is another big question. And it is correct. Pass rates for some of our divisions right now are as low as 42%. One thing that is key to remember is that NCARB does not have a target pass rate that we're trying to achieve. The pass rate truly is a reflection of the candidates who are taking the exam. And in some cases that might point to just the types of experiences a candidate is accruing, the types of references that they might be studying. What we typically see with exams is after an exam has been out for a while, for instance, ARE 4.0 was active for about 10 years, and it's pass rates also started off in the 40 to 50% range and slowly crept up over time as candidates were getting more and more accustomed to it.

So, we fully expect that that's where ARE 5.0 will move over time as candidates get more used to the exam and so the format and the various tools that are offered for it. But again, I just want to emphasize what NCARB is doing is working with our psychometricians to, again, go through a very rigorous cut score process. We work with our test consultants and our exam volunteers to make sure that items are written to an agreed upon standard, that statistical analysis I talked about previously to ensure that all items that are scored are accurate and relevant and appropriate for belonging on the exam. And then of course, videos like this and all of the other resources that we have for candidates to be really able to educate themselves about what is on the ARE so that candidates can go into the test center or their online proctor the exam coming soon and be really prepared to do well on their exam.

Jared Zurn [20:28]: So, our next question related to this is:

So, per division, are there a guaranteed number of fails?
And as Michelle said, there's not. There's no set percent that pass. There's no percent that fail. And so it really is about measuring each individual candidate against the cut score for the form of questions that they took.

Michelle Cohn [20:52]: Our last question in this video today is:

When I run out of time during the exam, is that a likely fail?
And I'll say, no. It depends on how far along you were in the exam when you ran out of time. As Jared mentioned, the cut score really is just a number of correct items that you need to achieve across the entire exam. So, if you weren't able to get to the last couple of questions, but you did really well on the exam up until that point, you might be fine, and you might have met that cut score and get that pass score report.

If there was a lot of the questions that you weren't able to get to because you ran out of time, then you might not be able to pass. Because again, you wouldn't have seen enough questions or answered enough correctly to get that passing score. So, really it just depends. And I think a lot of taking the ARE is about time management and when you see the new demonstration exam that's launching soon, again, that's going to be a much longer demonstration exam than we have today. And hopefully for you as a candidate, that will be a really great opportunity to understand what the three-hour exam is like and really get a better sense of how the pace yourself through that entire exam length.

Michelle Cohn [22:07]: That is all the questions that we have on this topic for today. So, hopefully you found this helpful and I hope that you tune in to other videos that we have coming soon. Thanks.