

NCARB Live Follow-Up: Online Proctoring Basics, Scheduling, and Exam Content

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Jared Zurn [00:00] Welcome to another video of NCARB answering questions from our most recent NCARB Live. And we're going to cover several topics on this video. These questions really revolve around the area of online proctoring and questions about scheduling an exam. So let's just kick it off. I'll start with the first question, talking about the transition from ARE 5.0 to—really not a transition to—still ARE 5.0. So the first question is:

Why weren't we given the option to transition to the new format or keep the old format like with the transition from ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0?

And as I just alluded to, ARE 5.0 is still going to be there. It's the same six divisions. It's the same content area. And so candidates that are preparing to test today watching this video or candidates that are going to test after the online proctoring option launches, you're really taking the same content. And so there really is no transition. There's no credit model. And so NCARB decided that it wasn't worth sort of doing this dual-delivery and having different testing experiences for people in the test center versus people not in the test center.

Michelle Cohn [01:10]: All right. Our next question, very similar:

Will NCARB offer any sort of compensation or incentive to candidates transitioning from the old to new format like they did with ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0?

So again, it's really not a transition like when we moved from ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0. Again, that content is the same. And we are really looking at just maintaining that consistency in both of the testing modalities, but with that same content as we introduce the online proctoring option. So no, there's no sort of compensation or incentive that's planned. We really hope that candidates will just continue to test either in a test center like they have been used to, or take advantage of the new online proctoring option.

Jared Zurn [01:59]: So the next question is:

How will the exam experience of someone who passed the exam in August compare with another person who takes the exam after the online proctoring option launches?

And so really the testing experience is going to be different between those two candidates in that there are some changes to the navigation around how the candidates will work their way throughout the exam around breaks and things like that. And we're going to talk more about that on this video. And then the other thing candidates need to understand is there's just more flexibility with the online proctoring option because all the Prometric test centers that are available today are still available. Plus there will be the opportunity to test in a remote location using online proctoring.

Michelle Cohn [02:40]: All right. Now we have several questions here really about just comparing those two modalities like Jared was alluding to. So our first question in this section is:

Do you have to take all of your exams either in-person or online?

And so the answer there is yes. So currently can take your exams in person in the test center. And so we are now adding that option to test in online proctoring. So all candidates will have two options in which to take their exams.

Jared Zurn [03:10]: So the next question is:

Can you clarify which exam changes will apply to in-person exams as well as online exams?

And I will say the clarification is, the changes apply to both. It is the exact same exam, whether somebody takes it in a test center or whether somebody who's going to take it through an online proctoring option. And then it says:

What is the effective date for those changes?

And so as of today, the expected launch date for the online proctoring option is going to be Monday, December 14th.

Michelle Cohn [03:42]: Next question.

Why do all exam changes have to be applied to in-person exams as well?

So this comes back to some points that we have made in other questions and other videos about really maintaining that consistent testing experience. Of course, we realize that testing at home is just going to be different from testing in a test center, but it comes back to having a consistent set of tools and a consistent set of policies that apply to all candidates regardless of where they are testing.

Jared Zurn [04:10]: So the next question.

NCARB has attributed some of the new exam changes to the need for equitable treatment, but a lot of factors already cause inequitable exam experiences. How can NCARB reconcile making these changes while there are already large differences in candidate experience?

So I think as I alluded to in one of the previous videos or in this one, exam experience is not something that NCARB can completely control, right? There are too many factors around which test center you go to on which day, what's happening outside that test center. So what NCARB can really control is the construction of the ARE and the tools around which we provide that delivery. And that's what we're going to continue to maintain consistently across both online and onsite deliveries.

Michelle Cohn [05:03]: This next question is related to that.

With home environments being so varied, how can NCARB really ensure that candidates have the same exam experience?

So again, it really is about maintaining that consistent set of tools and policies for all candidates regardless of where they're testing. And even though my home testing area might look very different from Jared's home testing area, both of us will be required to comply with that clean desk policy, with having a closed door to our room, with not being disturbed while we're in our secure testing areas. So it's policies like that that will really ensure that candidates are testing under similar conditions to allow for that consistent testing.

Jared Zurn [05:48]: So there's a next section of questions we're going to jump into now, which really do start to talk about some things around fees and around policies. And so the first question here is:

Is the price staying the same? And it says, "I'm taking a shorter exam with fewer questions. So shouldn't the price adjust accordingly?"

So the price is staying the same. So the price for a division today is \$235. The price is going to continue to be \$235 per division. The decrease in the number of items as you see, and we'll probably talk about it in a little bit, doesn't necessarily shorten the exam appointment length time. And so overall the price that the exam costs is staying the same.

Michelle Cohn [06:30]: Next.

Will NCARB offer a rolling clock extension while candidates adjust to these exam changes?

That is not planned at this time. As we've mentioned before, we've already provided 15 months of rolling clock extensions based on extenuating circumstances related to the pandemic. So that is a sort of thing that we'll be keeping an eye on to determine if additional extensions are needed. But at this time we're not looking at needing additional extensions just based on changing the exam tools.

Jared Zurn [06:59]: So next question is:

Can candidates who scheduled an appointment before the changes were announced have a refund?

And the answer to that is no, we're not doing refunds because what you really purchased is you purchased the seat credit, and we understood that that seat credit then gives you the flexibility to schedule an appointment. You can certainly reschedule that appointment if you would like to schedule it before the launch date, if you want to take the exam in its current format, or you can wait if you've already scheduled an appointment for after the launch, you can maintain that appointment date and then experience the new exam. The reality is right now, NCARB has waived rescheduling fee. So candidates have total flexibility if they want to reschedule, and rescheduling fees are waived through the end of December.

Michelle Cohn [07:43]: All right. We have another group of policy questions here that are less about money and just about general policies. So our next question here.

Is offering online proctoring a permanent exam change and the changes associated with it?

So yes, once we launch online proctoring, we will be offering online proctoring and we have no discussion about then taking away the online proctoring option. Some of you might have seen our announcement that next summer we'll be switching from Prometric to a different vendor, PSI. So that will be a change coming up in the future. But as far as offering online proctoring and the idea of being proctored by someone over your webcam and having the various, the clean desk policy and the changes associated with that, those are here to stay.

Jared Zurn [08:40]: So the next question says,

"NCARB can withhold your test scores if you have bad debt according to the new [ARE 5.0] Guidelines. What does bad debt mean?"

So, first of all, thank you for reading the guidelines. And what bad debt means in this area is that if you have an outstanding charge with NCARB, and so that can happen if a candidate let's say purchases a seat credit using their credit card, but then that credit card charge is rejected. What it does is it triggers back to NCARB that that seat credit then is in your account, but yet has not been compensated through your credit card company. And so that's how somebody would end up having it bad debt with NCARB.

Michelle Cohn [09:23]: Next question.

Is the retest or retake period changing?

So quick refresher here. That retest period that we're referring to is that if candidates fail an exam, you have a minimum 60-day wait before you're able to retest in that same division. If you fail again, again that's another 60-day wait. If you fail a third time, then you'll need to wait until the end of a 12-month period starting from the date of that first attempt in order to then test in that same division again. So three attempts at a division within a 12-month window is the retest policy. And no, that is not changing. Those policies, the three times within 12 months and the 60-day wait in between the attempts in the same division, those are based on security concerns and are really not related to the introduction of online proctored testing.

Jared Zurn [10:21]: Then we have a final sort of joint question around policies here, and it is about:

Is the updated exam accepted by all U.S. jurisdictions? And then a candidate who is very familiar with the State of Oregon noted that the Oregon Board of Architect Examiners was having a meeting in October to discuss the online proctor option.

And what I can report is that, having been part of that meeting, that the Oregon Board is going to be certainly accepting ARE 5.0 with the online proctoring option, just like they accept ARE 5.0 as they do today. NCARB has conducted a review of all of our jurisdictions' state laws and rules

and have found no impediments to any jurisdiction accepting the ARE, whether it's delivered via onsite or online.

Michelle Cohn [11:10]: Great. We are now going to move into a section of questions all related to scheduling your exams. So first question there:

Will all ARE divisions be available for online proctoring?

And I can answer, yes.

Jared Zurn [11:26]: Okay. The next question:

Are there any restrictions on testing from overseas?

So online proctoring is going to be available around the globe. Onsite is available at select locations around the globe. One of the considerations if you are testing globally is that there are some local jurisdictions that do not allow video recording and audio recording to take place. So if you do happen to live in one of those areas, what will happen is you will not be able to test online in that location because that would be a violation of that country's laws.

Michelle Cohn [12:07]: Right. Our next question:

When will scheduling for online proctoring be available?

So as Jared mentioned a few moments ago, December 14th is the launch date for the online proctoring option. And what that means is that on December 14th, candidates will be able to log in to their NCARB Record. When they go to schedule an exam, they will have the option to either schedule at a test center as they currently do or through the online proctoring option. Candidates in either case, you can schedule a minimum of three business days out. So you won't be able to test in the online proctoring mode on December 14th, but you will be able to schedule starting on that date and select a date and time based on proctor availability for later in December potentially.

Jared Zurn [13:00]: So our next question:

Will there still be seat number restrictions when scheduling an exam date?

So the reality is if you're scheduling an on-site appointment, there's certainly still going to be a certain number of seat restrictions based on your local test center. There's only so many seats at your local Prometric test center. When it comes to online proctoring, there are also some restrictions because you cannot just make an appointment. Appointments will be made available when proctors are available. So you may find that there are times you would love to take an online proctored exam, but yet you're not able to book that time. That would be because all of the online proctors are already fully scheduled.

Michelle Cohn [13:44]: Next scheduling question is:

Can we take the online test any time of day for instance at night or on the weekends?

So, yes, absolutely. And that might be one of the great advantages of online proctoring for some candidates who maybe can't take time off of work during a normal workday. And those Saturday appointments can be really hard to get at their local test center. So with online proctoring, it is available 24 hours a day and every day of the year. So it really, as Jared mentioned, just depends on when proctors are available. But if the best time for you to take an exam is at night after you finished up your workday, had dinner, and now you're ready to go again, test centers might not be open at nine o'clock at night, but if there's a proctor available, then most certainly you could test at night, on the weekends, on a Sunday when I know a lot of test centers are closed. So that really introduces a lot more options I think for candidates scheduling their exams.

Jared Zurn [14:44]: Okay. So we've just answered a bunch of questions about scheduling. Now we have questions about rescheduling. So the first one is:

Are the new rescheduling fees permanent?

So as announced in the updated guidelines, ARE rescheduling fees have been waived through the end of December and when they go back into effect on January 1, that they are going to be lower, and those are a new permanent rescheduling fee price. NCARB may always adjust these in the future up or down. But for now, that is the plan that those new rescheduling fees are permanent.

Michelle Cohn [15:19]: Great news. Now:

If I schedule an online proctoring appointment, can I reschedule it for in-person delivery instead and vice versa?

And yes, you absolutely can do that. And now there's right within the same scheduling tool that you would use to schedule your appointment. You would go back into your NCARB Record. Click on that exam and you'll have the option to reschedule within the same delivery type. So if it's an online proctored exam, you can reschedule for just a different day and time, still online proctored, or you could switch it to a test center exam and vice versa. When you switch modalities is what we would call that when you're switching, you would likely have to select a new date and time. So if you're scheduled to take the exam coming up on January 4th, you might not be able to still take it on January 4th if you switch modalities, but you can definitely switch, and the same rescheduling fees that Jared mentioned would apply when you're switching to that other modality.

Jared Zurn [16:23]: So the next question thinking off into the future is:

Can candidates cancel appointments scheduled for Prometric and reschedule them to be taken with PSI?

So, NCARB is not planning to launch test administration services with PSI until June of 2021 or later. So the reality is right now, candidates can only test in the Prometric network. And then

what will happen is there's going to be a time later next spring where candidates will have the option to migrate their eligibilities from the Prometric channel into the PSI channel. And there's not going to be dual delivery in multiple channels. So there's going to be an end date for Prometric and then there will be a start date for PSI. So there really isn't going to be a canceling of Prometric appointments to take appointments in PSI. If you schedule an appointment with Prometric, you will be taking that appointment with Prometric. And then you will not be able to schedule any appointments with PSI until a much later date after you choose to migrate your eligibility to the PSI channel.

Michelle Cohn [17:28]: All right. Our next question:

I have an exam scheduled for December 20th, 2020. I would feel more comfortable doing the online proctoring rather than in-person, but it looks like I won't be able to schedule the appointment online until December 14th. Will I be able to reschedule without incurring a rescheduling fee?

So, yes, as Jared had mentioned, the rescheduling fees are waived until the end of this calendar year until the end of 2020. And when they go back into effect on January 1, they'll be reduced, but they are waived until that point. So if you think that you might want to reschedule, you should check your calendar. You can always bump your appointment out and then reschedule as needed once the online proctoring launches.

Jared Zurn [18:18] So the next question is very similar. Someone says:

I have an in-person exam scheduled before the launch of online proctoring, but would like to reschedule it for online proctoring. What should I do?

And what you should do in that case is you can go in right now and you can reschedule that appointment let's say for January 15th. Just pick a day well out beyond the launch of online proctoring. And then what would happen is when NCARB turns on the online proctoring option, you can come back into your Record in that mid-December timeframe, and you can reschedule that January appointment for an online alternative appointment. There's no rescheduling these until throughout the end of December. So you can do all of this at no additional cost.

Michelle Cohn [19:05]: Okay. Last question about rescheduling.

Can I reschedule an exam up to the day of the test? Are there any exceptions, especially with COVID concerns?

Okay. So the first part of this question is that in order to reschedule an exam without incurring a penalty, especially once those reschedule fees go back into effect, you do need to reschedule your exam by noon on the fourth business day prior to taking your exam. So even while we have waived the reschedule fees, you do need to reschedule your appointment again, four days in advance. There is no last-minute cancellation option there. However, that being said, certainly if you have a concern related to COVID, and we've always had that option, if there's a personal emergency that is preventing you from getting to the test center, reach out to

NCARB's customer service team. And that's something that our team can work with you to understand the issue and work with you to resolve it.

Jared Zurn [20:07]: Okay. We have a new section of questions. This time we've labeled these inside the test. So this is a bunch of questions about when you're actually going to be taking the test. So the first question is:

Could you please explain more about the three-option multiple choice items that are now included? What do we mean by three-option multiple choice? What do you mean by now included? Is this the new multiple choice?

So let's first of all talk about what a three-option multiple choice is compared to today. So today on the ARE all of the multiple-choice questions have four options. So you're given the question. And then you've got four different options and you pick the one option that is correct. So what we've done is we've gone in and we've evaluated a series of our existing four option multiple choice questions. We have determined that some of what we call the “distractors,” some of the incorrect answers, really have no value. Candidates are basically just wasting time reading them, but they never actually pick that distractor. So what we're doing is we're eliminating what we call a “non-functioning distractor.”

So you will see some multiple-choice questions in the future that asks you a question and you'll only have three options to determine which one is the correct. You will still see some four option multiple choice questions. So expect to see both on the test. Don't worry if you see three options. Don't worry if you see four options. For both of them, it's still pick the one correct option. When will they be included? They're going to be included with the launch of the online proctoring option. And this is a new type of multiple choice for NCARB, but it's actually quite standard in the industry. There are many exams that use three option multiple choice as well as four options.

Michelle Cohn [21:50]: Our next question.

Will code references be included for non-case study questions?

And the answer there is yes. If a candidate needs some code information in order to answer the question, then that would definitely be provided. It might be provided within the stem or within the question statement itself, or maybe provided as an exhibit to go alongside that question statement. Candidates are not expected to memorize sections of the code documents. So if there's something that is necessary to apply to the question in order to come up with that correct answer, then definitely that would be provided to you within the context of the question.

Jared Zurn [22:29]: The next question is:

Will there still be structural questions?

The answer is yes. As architects, we are guaranteed we have to know some aspects of structures. That will still continue to be assessed within some of the divisions of the ARE.

Michelle Cohn [22:46]: Right. Our next question.

Can you please explain the additional percentage breakdown listed in the new [ARE 5.0] Handbook concerning number of questions that will be asked per each category?

So a few things here, we did just debut a new handbook to go with the online proctoring option. And that does have some added information. We've mentioned before that the contents of the exam is staying the same when we add the new online proctoring options. So you might be thinking, why is there a new handbook? Well, we haven't changed the content that's within the handbook. We've just continued to add to it to make it just more useful to you.

So what we have always provided within the handbook is within each division, there's usually four or five different content areas. And so we've always provided to you a breakdown of about what percentage of the exam is covered by each content area. So you can understand, well, there's lot more about codes in this particular division. And there's a little bit about another topic, but really the emphasis is on this first topic. We've provided some additional breakdown in this new updated version of the handbook that says within these content areas, and those percentages haven't changed, but now within those content areas, we're going to provide you some more information about the objectives, right?

So again, we've always provided in the past. Each content area includes some objectives that really drill into specific topics within an overall topic area. Well, now we're letting you know within each of those objectives again, what is the percentage of the exam that's going to be covered by each of those objectives. So you can start to understand relative importance of the various objectives within the content areas and the relative importance of those content areas within the overall division.

It's important to note that passing a division doesn't mean passing a certain number of content areas or passing a certain number of objectives. The questions are going to be asked in random order, and it's best to approach each question as if it's another chance to earn a point. So we really encourage you to just do your best in all of those objectives in all content areas. But we thought this would provide some added information for candidates to just get a better sense of how that material is going to be incorporated within their exam.

Jared Zurn [25:18]: So our next question about inside the test is:

Will I know which questions require calculations so I can leave those to the end?

The answer is no, you will not know which questions require calculations. As Michelle had just noted, the questions are delivered in a random order to every candidate. So there's really no way to know which questions will require calculations and which will not.

Michelle Cohn [25:42]: Next question:

I read that there would be changes to the PDF viewer to make it easier to use. How specifically will it be different?

Well, I hope the big thing that candidates notice is that it's going to be faster. We work routinely with our various testing partners and software development and enhancements is one of those areas. And so along with other changes rolling out to support online proctoring, we have upgraded the PDF viewer. It will be faster. You will still be able to see bookmarks. We'll still be able to search for keywords. You'll still be able to see some new versions of the different pages within a multi-page document. And it will be included in the demo exam, which we'll be launching in mid-November. So again, that opportunity to try out that and other tools prior to the online proctor version launching in December, you will be able to see the PDF viewer in the demo exam.

Jared Zurn [26:42]: And then our final question in this section is:

Will the material visuals, especially diagrams with detailed lines, be improved with the update?

And as Michelle just mentioned, the update does include this new PDF viewer and the vast majority of the images that candidates do experience on the ARE are PDFs. So we are hoping that they not only load faster, but there should be an improved level of quality in some of the images that are displayed.

Michelle Cohn [27:09]: All right. We have one last section of questions for this video and these all cover security. So our first security-related question.

With remote proctoring, is NCARB 100% confident with the security of the exams?

So as we have previously discussed, we have a number of new policies that are rolling out related to the launch of online proctoring. And so those include the clean desk policy that we've spoken about. There're various requirements related to setting up your online proctor testing environments in your home or workplace. There're policies regarding how candidates can take breaks that are going to apply to both modalities that you're testing in either at home or in a test center. And all of those are around really ensuring as best we can the security of the exams to help maintain really the reliability of the exams for the purpose of awarding licensure.

Jared Zurn [28:14]: So our next question says:

How will NCARB address the issues of online testing facial ID recognition problems that other online tests have encountered for people with darker skin tones?

So NCARB actually looked into this and specifically is choosing an online proctoring solution that does not depend on facial recognition. I understand the problems that are out there with some of the let's remove the human from the check-in procedure to make it faster and cheaper. And NCARB didn't choose that option. When candidates go in process, they will be interacting with a person who is going to be able to talk to you, capture the right image of your ID if there's a problem with that. And so that was specifically addressed in the decision we made about which vendors to go with for online proctoring.

Michelle Cohn [29:03]: Our next question here:

How many candidates does an online proctor oversee?

So under normal testing conditions, that would be about 10 assigned to one proctor who would be viewing them all on a screen but with being able to observe what each of those candidates is doing. If there is behavior that concerns a proctor or something that appears to need a little bit more attention, then that can be escalated to a one-on-one proctoring setup to be able to observe more carefully what might be happening with that candidate.

Jared Zurn [29:41]: So the next question is:

Can you speak on any privacy issues concerned with the proctor observing your exam?

And I will say this is something that our candidates should truly think about is if you do sign up to take an online proctored exam, throughout the entire exam experience, you're going to be both on video and live audio. And so if you're not comfortable with that, then I would not suggest that you actually sign up to take an online proctored exam. I do think there are some options or some things you can do as a candidate.

You'll notice you have a view right now into my home office, but it's very sterile. Pictures of my wife and my children are not up behind me. I would make choices like that personally if I were to take an online proctored exam. And again, from a test perspective, what I will say is the online proctor is not viewing your items as you're taking the exam. The online proctor is really watching you take the test. And so just be very aware of that fact. And if you do have concerns, then consider continuing to testing in the test center.

Michelle Cohn [30:43]: **Security seems to be a big point in these changes. Why is this coming up now and not previously. Has test security become such a big problem lately?**

And no, I wouldn't say that all of a sudden, test security is a big issue, but I would say it's something that we monitor carefully. And certainly with the rollout of online proctoring, it did introduce some additional security concerns that we needed to address. So there were not specific issues at test centers that we said, "Oh my goodness, we need to make these changes." But again, considering the implementation of online proctoring and wanting to ensure a consistent testing experience for all of our candidates and just staying up on best practices within the overall testing industry, now is the right time to be introducing some new security protocols.

Jared Zurn [31:40]: And our final security question for this video is:

What will happen if someone gets caught cheating on the ARE?

And the high level overview of the process is that if somebody is found to have cheated on the ARE, whether they took notes into the test center or were trying to access notes while testing online, or whether somebody discloses content that they viewed on the test after the fact, what ends up happening is the candidate goes through a process where they're given the opportunity to defend themselves with their actions. They are reported to the professional conduct committee at NCARB, which basically adjudicates that candidate's case. The candidate's jurisdictional licensing board is notified throughout this entire process. And then whatever findings are made are also reported back to the jurisdictional licensing board.

So what can happen is anything from a candidate receiving a warning letter, if it was a very, very minor infraction, all the way up to full suspension of test taking privileges where a candidate may honestly never be able to take the ARE, which means they will never become a licensed architect in any one of the 55 U.S. jurisdictions.

So that comes to the end of this set of questions in this video. We hope you found these answers helpful. There was a lot covered. And again, thank you very much for your time.