



SUMMER 2013

Understanding the NCLEX[®] Examination Through the Standard-setting Process

This is the second of a four-part series. Subsequent parts of this article will appear in future issues of the NCLEX[®] Communiqué.

The standard-setting process for the NCLEX[®] examination is an example of the core values of NCSBN in action, supporting collaboration, evidence-based decisions and excellence in upholding integrity of the examination scoring process. The passing standards for the NCLEX examinations are re-evaluated by the NCSBN Board of Directors (BOD) every three years. Standard setting is a process that requires the BOD to consider a variety of evidence in order to establish an examination passing standard which best ensures that NCLEX candidates are competent and able to practice safely and effectively.

The BOD considers the results of an annual survey sent to nursing educators and nursing employers regarding the competence of the current group of entry-level nurses. Survey respondents are asked to provide feedback on the level of competence of entry-level nurses and whether the current NCLEX passing standard is set at an appropriate level. A panel of judges is also convened to conduct a standard-setting workshop. The panel of judges utilizes the Angoff method (1984) supplemented by the Beuk method (1984) in order to provide a passing standard recommendation to the BOD.

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Additionally, the BOD reviews the outcomes of previous passing standard-setting decisions, past and current data describing NCLEX candidate performance, and national data reflecting graduating students' preparedness for entry into the nursing profession. After full consideration of all evidence, including their personal knowledge about client acuity, nursing education and nursing practice, the BOD makes an informed decision relating to a reasonable and legally defensible passing standard that most closely represents the minimal ability level necessary for safe and effective nursing practice.

The standard-setting process supports collaboration by utilizing information from a variety of stakeholders in nursing and testing, including nurses, educators, employers, regulators and psychometricians. The NCLEX standard-setting process illustrates the transparency of the NCLEX examinations,

proving that the NCLEX passing standard is not set arbitrarily. The integrity of the NCLEX exam is supported by the BOD's assumed responsibility to approve the NCLEX passing standards in a nonbiased, informed and legally defensible manner. Finally, the re-evaluation of the NCLEX passing standards on a three year cycle promotes excellence by ensuring that the NCLEX examination consistently passes nurses who are capable of providing safe and effective care to the public.

References

- Angoff, W. H. (1984). *Scales, norms and equivalent scores*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Beuk, C. H. (1984). A method for reaching a compromise between absolute and relative standards in examinations. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 21, 147–152.

An Introduction to Pearson VUE and Our Role in the Canadian Transition to NCLEX®

Anthony Zara, PhD, Vice President,
Assessment Solutions, Pearson VUE

As you may have seen in previous issues of the NCLEX® Communiqué, the collaboration between NCSBN and the nurse regulatory bodies of Canada includes an important role for Pearson VUE. Pearson VUE is NCSBN's long-time testing services partner. The NCSBN-Pearson VUE partnership celebrated several milestones in 2012. In addition to delivering our 2.5 millionth NCLEX exam, we celebrated our 10-year anniversary of test delivery. We also extended our partnership through 2019 and are excited by our opportunity to support NCSBN with its collaboration with Canadian regulatory bodies.

Our preparation for delivery (beginning January 2015) of the NCLEX-RN® in Canada is well underway:

- In April we participated in the first NCLEX® Conference in Canada, held in Toronto, and hosted by NCSBN for Canadian regulators and educators. This conference provided orientation to the NCLEX, computerized adaptive testing (CAT), and computer-based testing (CBT), as the audience begins its paradigm shift away from its current paper-and-pencil delivery model.
- In the first four months of 2013, we hosted Canadian representatives from nine out of the 10 participating Canadian regulatory bodies in item development panels at our Chicago offices. Their participation represents important practical steps in the Canadian transition, and so far we have received positive and valuable feedback from the participants and the regulators leading the transition.
- We have created a roadmap for developing the test centres needed to support the 2015 launch of NCLEX in Canada, providing access to the NCLEX to Canadians in geographically isolated areas.



- We will be joining NCSBN and CCRNR at the fall regional workshops to assist in providing important information to Canadian nurse educators who are preparing students to take the NCLEX in 2015.

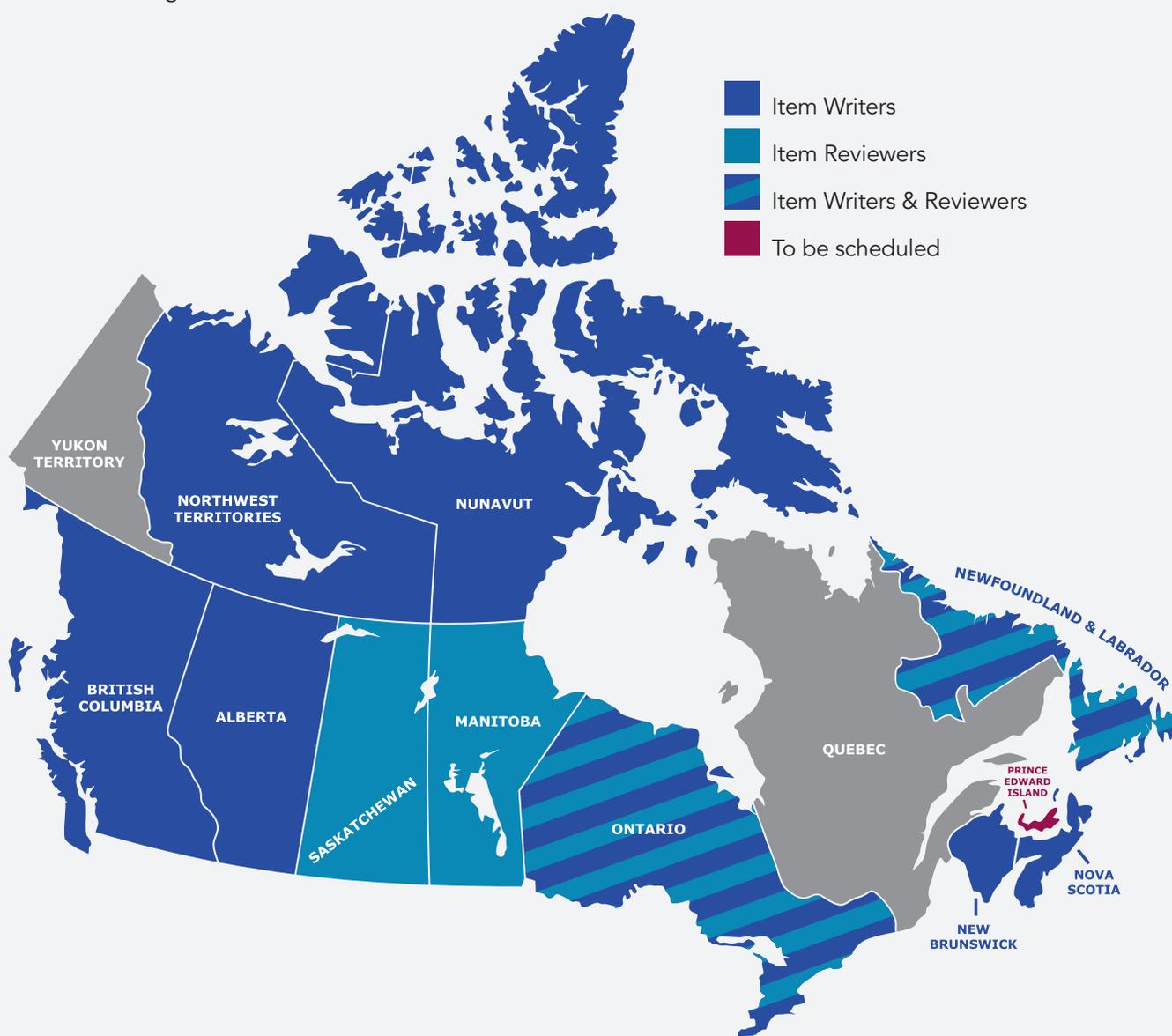
Pearson VUE is pleased with our involvement in collaborating with NCSBN and the nurse regulatory bodies of Canada to provide the NCLEX-RN Examination for the purpose of licensure/registration decision making. We hope that the information provided will assist all stakeholders during this implementation transition. We value collaboration and welcome your feedback and input to help make this a successful transition!

Dr. Zara provides strategic direction and leadership to the testing services team at Pearson VUE to provide client-focused service solutions for high-stakes testing programs. As an expert in CAT research and test development, Zara has been a well-known expert and speaker in the areas of test development, psychometric methods and computerized testing research for more than 20 years.

Canadian Participation on NCLEX-RN® Item Development Panels

The NCLEX-RN® reflects the combined efforts and expertise of the nursing community in the sense that all test items are authored and reviewed by volunteer panels of RN educators and clinicians representing all geographic areas that use the exam. In February 2013 Canadian nurses began traveling to Chicago to serve on item development panels and will continue to serve so long as Canadian regulators rely upon the NCLEX-RN exam as a requirement for nurse licensure/registration.

The map below highlights the broad geographic representation of Canadian nurses during the first eight panels for which Canadians have been eligible. To date, nine of the 10 regulatory jurisdictions that adopted the new exam have had at least one volunteer serve on an NCLEX-RN panel, with both Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario already having had volunteers serve on multiple panels.





Session evaluations from Canadian participants have stressed many positive aspects of the volunteer experience and the examination, including those listed below:

- The majority of the test content applies to many patient care settings, including home care or clinic settings, rather than only to hospital settings.
- There is involvement by practicing nurses throughout the entire item development process. This includes nursing educators who write the test items, as well as bedside clinicians who review the test items for currency in nursing practice and appropriateness for entry-level nurses.
- Quality checks are applied throughout the entire item development process to ensure accuracy of the test content.

All qualified registered nurses are encouraged to apply for consideration through the NCSBN [NCLEX Volunteer Opportunities](#) page.

“Participating in the NCLEX Item Development process provided a great opportunity to meet nursing colleagues on an international level. I didn’t realize developing the NCLEX exam was such a rigorous process. The NCLEX exam content is very relevant to nursing in Canada. I am confident the exam will meet the needs of the Canadian nursing students.”

–Canadian RN clinician

“The experience of writing items for the NCLEX exam was great. To meet and collaborate with other nurses was very rewarding. Participating in the NCLEX Item Development process provided the benefit of learning how to create higher-order, critical thinking test items in different formats.”

–Canadian RN educator

A Short Interview with NCSBN's CEO and the Chief Officer, Examinations

We had the chance to ask Kathy Apple, MS, RN, FAAN, and Philip Dickison, PhD, RN, a few questions about NCSBN's testing philosophy.

What is NCSBN's testing mission?

Kathy Apple: "The ultimate responsibility of NCSBN is to support the work of the boards of nursing (BONs) in protecting the public through the provision of competent nursing care. Throughout the entire history of the organization one of its paramount initiatives is to assure that only safe and competent nurses are licensed to practice."

Philip Dickison: "The NCLEX is a critical component of this work. It provides BONs with a nurse licensure examination that is constantly and rigorously evaluated to keep pace with the rapidly evolving health care environment."

What does NCSBN bring to the world of testing?

KA: "NCSBN is a recognized expert in the world of health care certification and licensure examination. It currently provides the most psychometrically sound, legally defensible computerized adaptive examination available in the world."

PD: "The team of content development experts, psychometricians, and examination administration/security experts are respected for their knowledge and skills across the globe. The NCLEX sets the standard, both domestically and internationally, for psychometric, security and administration of computerized adaptive examinations."



Kathy Apple, MS, RN, FAAN



Philip Dickison, PhD, RN

How do Canadian nurses and nurse educators fit into this process now and as the process moves forward?

KA: "The Canadian nurses and nurse educators will be a vital component to the ongoing development of the NCLEX."

PD: "Canadian nurses and nurse educators have already begun their contributions to the test development process. Some will write test items and others will serve as test item reviewers to ensure that the items are appropriate for entry-level practice and reflect currency of nursing practice."

Available Test Centres for Canadian NCLEX® Candidates

One of the benefits of the exam model chosen by CCRNR is the flexibility it provides candidates seeking licensure/registration from Canadian regulatory bodies. Canadian candidates may sit for the NCLEX-RN® at any Pearson Professional Centre (the permanent test sites) in Canada, any Temporary Test Centre and any Pearson Professional Centre located in the U.S. Appointments at permanent Pearson Professional Centres are available year round. Once candidates are made eligible for the exam by the regulatory body, they can select any test centre in which to write the NCLEX-RN. Candidates will schedule their NCLEX-RN using the [Pearson VUE website](#) or by phone with Pearson VUE's call centre. The table below outlines test centre availability by location.

Province/Territory	City	February	June	October
Alberta	Calgary*		year-round availability	
	Edmonton*		year-round availability	
British Columbia	Kamloops		15 days	
	Nanaimo		10 days	
	Prince George		13 days	
	Surrey*		year-round availability	
	Vancouver*		year-round availability	
	Victoria		15 days	
Manitoba	Winnipeg*		year-round availability	
New Brunswick	Fredericton	10 days	27 days	4 days
Newfoundland & Labrador	St. John's	1 day	15 days	4 days
	Corner Brook		4 days in June	
Northwest Territories	Yellowknife	1 day	1 day	1 day
Nova Scotia	Halifax*		year-round availability	
	Sydney		6 days	
Nunavut	Iqaluit		1 day	1 day
Ontario	Hamilton*		year-round availability	
	London*		year-round availability	
	Ottawa*		year-round availability	
	Sudbury	4 days	12 days	
	Thunder Bay		12 days	
	Toronto (2)*		year-round availability	
	Windsor		12 days	
Prince Edward Island	Charlottetown	1 day	8 days	3 days
Quebec	Montreal*		year-round availability	
Saskatchewan	Regina		10 days	
	Saskatoon*		year-round availability	

*Pearson Professional Centre

Frequently Asked Questions

How will the NCLEX® address terminology differences between the U.S. and Canada (e.g., color/colour, Native American/First Nation)?

During item development, all items undergo a continuous and multilayer review process to ensure the exam remains psychometrically sound and content relevant. These review processes include Canadian representatives at each stage to ensure that terminology differences are identified and addressed. Additionally, all newly written items are administered as pretest items to actual NCLEX candidates. Only items that meet statistical and differential item functioning (DIF) criteria become operational. This rigorous process ensures that all NCLEX operational items are free from bias.

How do you ensure that Canadian candidates will not be expected to answer questions on skills that are not considered entry level in parts of Canada (i.e., ventilators, arterial lines)?

In 2010, NCSBN conducted several research studies comparing nursing practice and nursing competencies in the U.S. and Canada. The results of these studies revealed a 98 percent congruency in nursing practice and competencies between the two countries. Canadian regulatory bodies will conduct a review of operational NCLEX items to ensure all items administered starting in 2015 are congruent with regulatory nurse practice acts and entry-level scope of practice in the 10 provinces/territories.



Should educator tests/exams reflect how students are tested on the NCLEX-RN®?

Educators should ensure that their students are familiar with the different types of items that appear on the NCLEX. NCSBN and Pearson VUE provide a number of resources for achieving this goal. The [NCLEX® Tutorial](#) provides a hands-on opportunity for students to practice responding to the various item types available on the NCLEX exam using non-nursing content. The [2013 NCLEX-RN® Detailed Test Plan](#) provides a sample NCLEX item after each of the test plan categories utilizing several types of NCLEX items. Additionally, the educator version of the 2013 NCLEX-RN® Detailed Test Plan includes an item writing exercise, which provides step-by-step instructions on how to develop an exam item.

How will CCRNR ensure that accommodation requests are reviewed using the same standards across the country?

Accommodation requests are currently reviewed by each provincial or territorial regulatory body in accordance with its applicable human rights legislation, the policies of each regulatory body and the requirements of the exam provider. Requests for accommodations on the NCLEX will be reviewed according to the same legislative requirements and in accordance with regulatory body and NCSBN policies.

Timeline

2012

Summer

Contracts signed
Transition team established

Fall

NCLEX Item Development Volunteer Application made available to Canadian nurses
Began dialogue with educators and other stakeholders to produce materials to assist in using the test plan to aid in curriculum review
Transition plan established

2013

Winter (January – March)

Began quarterly communication on the status of the transition processes
Scheduled future meetings/trainings with Canadian nurse educators and nurse regulation staff
Canadian item writers included in item writing workshops
Canadian item reviewers included in item review workshops

Fall (October – December)

Canadian RN experts added to the NCLEX-RN subject matter experts (SMEs)
NCLEX workshops

2014

Spring (April – June)

NCLEX Administration Website activated for Canadian nurse regulators
Canadian nurse regulators join item review process
French translation of the NCLEX® Candidate Bulletin available
French translation of the NCLEX® Computerized Adaptive Testing Tutorial available

Fall (October – December)

Canadian representative sample added to the continuous RN practice analysis methodology
Initial translation of NCLEX-RN item pool into French
Perform alpha test and privacy impact analysis of delivery of NCLEX-RN in Canadian test centres
NCLEX Candidate Website activated for Canadian candidate registrations
NCLEX Candidate Call Centre activated for Canadian candidates
SMEs review operational NCLEX-RN pool

2015

Winter (January – March)

Canadian test centres activated

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