

# 2012 IBLCE Exam Eligibility Requirements

## for First-Time Candidates

The International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE) Board of Directors has revised the exam eligibility requirements for first-time certification candidates. The revisions reflect the commitment by the IBLCE Board of Directors to enhance the quality of the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) credential.

Beginning in 2012, all **first-time candidates** will be required to have completed the following education and clinical practice experience **prior to applying for the exam**:

- 90 hours of pre-exam education in human lactation and breastfeeding

**and**

- Meet **ONE** of the following requirements
  - Be a registered/licensed/recognized health professional in their country
  - **Or** have completed **both** of the following general education requirements:
    - 8 general education courses of one semester, or equivalent, in length
    - 6 additional continuing education subjects

**and**

- Clinical breastfeeding practice hours

The IBLCE is continually reviewing and improving the IBCLC credential. As an integral component of this process, evidence necessitated that the education requirements of all first time exam candidates be enhanced.

All eligibility criteria are considered to be minimum requirements. Based upon the individual's training and background, additional coursework or lactation specific clinical practice hours may be needed to successfully complete the examination. IBLCE acknowledges that most health professionals will have studied the general education requirements within their professional training. The education requirements are enhanced to ensure that all IBCLC exam candidates are well educated and prepared to provide quality care.

*Please Note: Prospective IBCLCs who are planning to take the IBLCE certification exam in 2010 or 2011 are not expected to meet these new requirements. For information about the eligibility requirements for the 2010 and 2011 exams visit ["www.iblce-europe.org"](http://www.iblce-europe.org).*

## IBLCE Exam Eligibility Criteria from 2012

The new eligibility criteria will be introduced as of the 2012 exam. All eligibility criteria are considered to be minimum requirements. Based upon the individual's training and background, additional coursework or lactation specific clinical practice hours may be needed to successfully complete the examination. To be eligible to sit the exam candidates must fulfil the criterion in one of the three following pathways:

### Pathway 1.

#### Health Professionals and Mother Support Counsellors

The exam candidate must practice as a health professional **or** certified mother support counsellor for a recognised mother to mother support organisation <sup>1</sup>. Exam Candidates must be working or volunteering within an organisation that ensures supervision, support and education of his/her clinical practice to have completed the following requirements:

- Minimum of 90 hours of lactation specific education <sup>4</sup> within the **5 years immediately** prior to exam application.
- 1000 lactation specific clinical practice hours<sup>5</sup> within **the 5 years immediately** prior to exam application.
- Mother support counsellors must provide evidence of completing the required education <sup>2</sup> in the identified subjects.

**N.B.** IBLCE strongly recommends that all candidates undertake a comprehensive lactation specific course that reflects the IBLCE Exam Blue Print. It would be expected that a comprehensive course would be around 120hrs+.

OR

### Pathway 2.

#### Lactation Specific Academic Program

With a vision toward the future, eligibility criteria have been established for individuals who graduate from lactation specific academic programs. IBCLE has established these criteria as the preferred method for IBCLC exam eligibility to encourage the development of more lactation specific academic programs. This option is very limited at present in Europe and the Middle East; before making a decision to follow this Pathway, prospective IBCLCs should contact IBLCE in Europe.

OR

### Pathway 3.

#### Pre Approved Programs

Pre approved program inclusive of a minimum of 500 direct hours of clinical supervision<sup>6</sup>. Candidates taking this pathway must also have met the education requirements<sup>2</sup>. Before

making a decision to follow this Pathway, prospective IBCLCs should contact IBLCE in Europe.

**ALL CRITERION MUST BE COMPLETED BEFORE TIME OF SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION**

**DEFINITION OF TERMS:**

**Mother to mother support organisation <sup>1</sup>**

IBLCE defines a mother to mother support organisation when the all of the following applies:

- mother to mother breastfeeding counselling is provided by volunteers counsellors
- structured training programs are provided for their counsellors which includes comprehensive education in breastfeeding and lactation management
- have a Code of Ethics
- provide structured supervision for counsellors, with an appropriate level of training
- have requirements to stay current by participating in continuing education

**Education Requirements <sup>2</sup>:**

All first-time candidates must demonstrate completion of the equivalent of one semester of tertiary or further education <sup>3</sup> in the following subjects:

- Human Anatomy
- Human Physiology
- Biology
- Infant and Child Growth and Development
- Nutrition
- Sociology or Cultural Sensitivity or Cultural Anthropology
- Introduction to Research
- Psychology or Counselling or Communications Skills

And additional education must be documented in the following areas:

- Basic life support (e.g. CPR)
- Medical terminology
- Medical documentation
- Universal safety precautions and infection control
- Occupational safety, including security
- Professional/legal ethics (e.g. Code of Ethics)

**N.B.** Health Professionals - The above subjects would be covered in a health professional's training/degree. Evidence of completed individual subjects is not required of health professionals. A copy of the completed training/degree or professional registration is required with the exam application.

<sup>3</sup>Tertiary or further education refers to education acquired after completion of compulsory school education. It is typically provided at academies, universities, colleges, institutes of technology, trade schools and career colleges that award academic degrees or professional certifications.

**Lactation specific education hours <sup>4</sup>:**

Education hours acquired by completing courses or programs that provide evidence based instruction in the disciplines and chronological periods listed on the IBLCE Exam Blueprint and/or training in the clinical skills listed on the Clinical Competencies for IBCLC Practice.

**Lactation specific clinical practice hours/breastfeeding counselling<sup>5</sup>:**

Clinical practice hours accumulated while providing direct care to pregnant and lactating women and their infants/children within a paid or volunteer capacity.

**Direct supervision<sup>6</sup>:**

A gradual process which begins with observation moves to clinical practice experience under direct observation until the skill is mastered, and culminates with independent practice with the mentor or supervisor physically nearby to assist and offer advice and support. In order to demonstrate mastery of a skill, the candidate is expected to complete all three phases of directly supervised clinical practice:

1. observation of the mentor, which is not included in the 500 hours of directly supervised clinical practice
2. clinical practice, i.e. working directly with breastfeeding mother-baby dyads, under the mentor's direct observation and supervision
3. independent clinical practice with the mentor available on-site and able to assist if needed.

If you have more questions visit the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the new requirements at "www.iblce-europe.org".

## Frequently Asked Questions about the 2012 Exam Eligibility Requirements

### ***Why was the requirement for education in human lactation and breastfeeding increased to 90 hours?***

Currently, Pathways 1 and 3 require candidates to have 45 hours of education in human lactation and breastfeeding. However, Pathway 2 requires candidates to have 90 hours of lactation specific education. The amount of education required of Pathway 2—90 hours—is much more realistic and responsible. If you examine the IBLCE Exam Blueprint, you will see that it is very difficult to cover all these topics in 45 hours. So, this change was made not only to make the requirement consistent for all the pathways but also to increase the likelihood that all exam candidates will have a comprehensive education in the subject matter that will be on the certification exam.

### ***I've not been able to find a course that offers at least 90 hours of instruction in human lactation and breastfeeding. How can I complete this requirement?***

There will be a transition period during which it may be difficult for prospective IBCLCs to find comprehensive courses that are at least 90 hours of instruction. IBLCE will be encouraging educators to expand their educational offerings to include courses of 90 hours or more, as well as promoting efforts to provide more distance and online learning opportunities. In the meantime, applicants may need to enroll in more than one education program. IBLCE strongly encourages applicants to take an AARC-approved course and/or to enroll in CERP-approved programs that offer L-CERPs.

### ***Why did the IBLCE Board of Directors make these changes?***

These changes are one of the approaches that the IBLCE Board is using to reach its strategic goal of increasing the value of IBCLC certification. Establishing general education requirements and standardizing the required amount of education in human lactation and breastfeeding are ways in which IBLCE can assure the public, consumers, employers and policy-makers that individuals who hold the IBCLC credential are competent, safe practitioners.

### ***I'm not a health professional and I have never studied some of the higher education subjects that are listed. Where can I get the coursework needed to meet the general higher education requirements?***

The ability of those who are not health professionals to meet these requirements will vary from country to country. In some parts of the world, you may complete these courses by enrolling in local colleges or universities. In addition, many colleges and universities offer online and distance learning enrollment through which this education may be completed. Consult your local college or university and/or search the Internet for online and distance education in these subjects.

### ***A number of years ago, I took courses in some of the required higher education subjects. Is there a time limit on this education?***

Previously completed higher education in the required subjects may be used to meet the general education requirement. There is no time limit on this education. If you have already studied one or more of these subjects as part of your higher education, request a transcript from the school where you completed the coursework. This transcript will be needed as verification that you completed the required education.

***What about the 6 additional topics such as medical terminology and universal safety precautions? Where can I get education in these topics?***

Local colleges and universities may offer non-credit or continuing education in these subjects. Some of the topics are also offered through distance or online learning opportunities that can be found through an Internet search. In addition, IBLCE anticipates that educators will develop courses that are specifically designed to meet these new requirements. In the interim until these courses are more widely available, IBLCE recognizes that meeting these requirements will be a challenge for some people. Nevertheless, the Board of Directors feels strongly that education in these topics is crucial to the purpose of certification—public safety and protection—and the value of the IBCLC credential in particular.

***Why did the IBLCE Board decide to specify education in the 14 subjects listed?***

The IBCLC credential is intended to designate someone who has the specialized knowledge and skills needed to provide competent lactation and breastfeeding care as part of the maternal-child health care team. In response to its commitment to public safety and protection, the IBLCE Board of Directors must take measures to ensure that exam candidates are prepared to function as respected and reliable members of the health care team. The 14 subjects specified are typical of the education required of health professionals such as nurses and midwives. Completion of education in these subjects positions exam candidates not only for success on the exam but also success in their practice as members of the health care team. These general education requirements increase the likelihood that policy-makers, employers, other health professionals and insurance companies will support licensure and reimbursement initiatives for IBCLCs.

***These new requirements will make becoming an IBCLC even more expensive. Are the IBLCE Board members concerned that the new requirements will reduce the number of applicants who are eligible to become IBCLCs?***

The new requirements may result in a decreased number of exam candidates in the short term. However, the reason for making these changes is to increase the value of IBCLC certification. The IBLCE vision for the IBCLC credential is to “increase the number and improve the quality of IBCLCs.” IBLCE is the global authority in lactation consultant certification and raising the educational standards for the lactation consultant profession is crucial to the future growth and value of the IBCLC credential. While there may be a short-term drop in the number of prospective IBCLCs, the increased value of the credential will make IBCLC certification more highly desired by not only first-time candidates but also by recertifying IBCLCs.

***I've heard that IBLCE used to allow applicants to complete their lactation specific education up until the day before the exam. Why is that no longer possible?***

In years past, the number of exam candidates was much smaller and there were fewer courses that offered appropriate pre-exam education. As the profession has grown, there are more first-time candidates and more recertifying IBCLCs. The increasing number of candidates has made it more difficult for staff to manage applications with incomplete requirements. Incomplete applications require more attention and follow-up. In addition, IBLCE must be fair to all candidates; allowing additional time to complete their lactation specific education could be construed as giving some candidates an advantage over others.

IBLCE anticipates that there will be a transition period during which first-time applicants may find it more difficult to complete their education in a timely manner. However, IBLCE is

confident that educators will respond to the need for not only expanding course offerings but also the need to schedule courses so as to allow applicants to complete the exam eligibility requirements in a timely manner. In turn, IBLCE will be responding to scheduling needs by introducing online application and computer-based testing—methodologies that will permit staff to more efficiently process, review and approve first-time exam applications.

***With these new requirements, it seems to me that IBLCE is discouraging those of us who are not health professionals from becoming IBCLCs. I know of several IBCLCs in my community who are not health professionals and they are well respected. Why has IBLCE placed so much focus on the new general education requirements?***

IBLCE continues to support the long-standing practice of welcoming and encouraging the community-based practitioners, who may not be health professionals, to prepare and become IBCLCs. The ability to actively listen and take the time to collaborate with mothers in developing an appropriate care plan and the dedication to supporting families beyond the early postpartum period are some of the well-developed competencies of candidates who are not health professionals.

As the lactation profession has matured, it has become clear that it is necessary for all IBCLCs to be well-grounded in those subjects that are typically studied by health professionals. A strong foundation of knowledge in the health disciplines that are typically included in health profession curricula will position all IBCLCs to function as well-respected members of the maternal-child health team. In addition, employers and policy-makers will have increased confidence in the IBCLC credential. With this increased confidence in place, initiatives such as licensure, reimbursement and more jobs for IBCLCs are more likely to be successful.