

# A passion for breastfeeding

**Any health visitor, nursery nurse or lay/voluntary worker who has the interest, passion, time and discipline should consider becoming an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant**

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I have been a health visitor for 20 years, working mainly with young families. I enjoy my job, but I was beginning to feel like a 'jack of all trades' and frequently exasperated when reading articles which began... 'the health visitor is ideally placed to take on the role of...' How thinly can we spread ourselves? I needed a new focus.

During my career, breastfeeding has been a real passion, which has been enhanced by my personal experience and work-based projects. For several years I have been involved in breastfeeding groups, pier-support courses and updating programmes. I wanted to increase and formalise my professional knowledge and so enquired about becoming an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC).

## What is an IBCLC?

IBCLCs are healthcare providers, with either professional or lay backgrounds, who are certified to possess the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to provide quality breastfeeding assistance to babies and mothers.<sup>1</sup> Certification is achieved after passing the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners' (IBLCE) examination.

## Preparing for the exam

Applicants need to demonstrate they possess the knowledge and skills about breastfeeding and practical experience in helping breastfeeding mothers.

The *IBLCE Exam Candidate Information Guide* details the various pathways of eligibility for prospective applicants, the experience and educational requirements, an examination blueprint and guidance on completing the lengthy application form.

## The exam

There is no set course of study for the exam; it depends on one's experience and background as to how many, and which books and study days, to invest in. The guide has a suggested reading list and runs special study days.

The IBCLC certificate had been mentioned in my individual performance review, so I was able to apply for funding. Contributions came from the PCT teaching budget, the training fund and a local nursing charity, which helped me to attend local study days, buy some resources and

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pay the exam fee. In addition, two colleagues from maternity and neonatal care were also taking the exam so we met every six weeks to study and share resources and expertise. The basic fee is £240 for the annual exam.

## Benefits of becoming an IBCLC

All three of us passed the examination. From my point of view, there have been tremendous benefits in achieving the IBCLC qualification.

Primarily, my understanding of breastfeeding has been enhanced across a wider area of disciplines. This has made me more confident about dealing with specific breastfeeding issues and extended my networks and mechanisms for continuing to increase my knowledge. The IBCLC

certificate is renewable every five years; I keep up to date on breastfeeding issues via organised study sessions and my own reading.

Second, the study time has made me more questioning in my practice. On two occasions, breastfeeding data has been presented to me in a very formal and prescriptive way, with inaccurate and out-of-date details. In both cases, I felt strong enough to challenge the information and was able to reverse a decision made by a formula milk company.

Third, having the IBCLC qualification has initiated other opportunities. I have been able to enjoy a short-term contract for protected breastfeeding hours; have become more involved in staff training; initiated a new breastfeeding group and spoken at two conferences. My network of breastfeeding contacts is now quite diverse, both within and outside of the health service. I can offer a good service to the community and have lots of ideas on how I can take the role forward. I feel more positive about my future pathway and, whether in the NHS or private sector, I know I have found my niche.

## Reference

- 1 Candidate Information Guide version 2.6 IBLCE 3.

## Information box

[www.iblce-europe.org](http://www.iblce-europe.org) (details of the qualification)  
[GB@iblce.edu.au](mailto:GB@iblce.edu.au) (UK Proctor for the exam)  
[www.lcgb.org](http://www.lcgb.org) (more information and study days)  
[www.breastfeedingmatters.co.uk](http://www.breastfeedingmatters.co.uk) (contact Lynn with questions or comments)