Janece,

Sorry it took me so long to reply.  It’s been a busy week.

I read the attachment you sent, and my first question is, does AVBS have a valid concern?  That is, does ***ACPV*** expect that there will be significant changes in the next six years that should have an effect on test content?  Ultimately, it is up to your board to determine how rapidly the field is changing and when it is important to update the exam.  Fields that change very rapidly conduct job analyses very frequently.  If ACPV has determined that six years is an appropriate time interval, you can probably justify using the current exam forms for six years.

However, if you feel that the ABVS concern is valid, that is, changes are likely to be needed to the exam soon, then you will want to do something to address this.  The best way to incorporate changes in the field into the exam is to conduct another job analysis and cut score study, with the frequency of this cycle being determined by the frequency and nature of the changes.

Of course, there is no law requiring that things be done on a certain schedule.  In these matters, we are guided by measurement standards, pressures from stakeholders (including organizations like the ABVS), and feasibility factors.  Limitations of funding and time may require us to choose procedures that are less than the ideal, yet go a long way toward serving the purpose of keeping the exam current and fair.  If ACPV had a large number of candidates each year, and changes were occurring rapidly in the profession, ***and*** you had a large enough budget, I would recommend making modifications to the exam every year or two and holding a cut score study each time.  Under such circumstances, a new job analysis would be conducted every time the board determined that changes to the content outline seemed necessary.  When the number of candidates is small and the budget is tight, however, we may need to get creative in finding ways to keep the exam current.

So, in answer to your direct questions, first, no, I would not simply substitute a new question when a regulation changes.  We would like to think that if the new question is very similar to the old one, the difficulty will be the same.  Unfortunately, that often proves not to be the case.

Second, could an update section be added that would have its own cut score?  Yes, I think this could be done.  You would probably want to have at least 10 questions in this section so the score would be reasonably reliable.  (20 or more questions would be better.)  You might also consider adding such questions as unscored, pretest questions initially, collecting information about the difficulty in discrimination of the questions, and deciding which ones to score based on the item statistics.  However, I am not sure this would work well for you, given the small number of candidates that test in a given year.

Finally, is there a way to update the exam and keep a valid cut score?  Ideally, no.  However, if it is not feasible to conduct a full job analysis and cut score study, a reasonably defensible procedure might be this:  1) have a committee of subject matter experts evaluate changes in professional practice and regulations and determine what changes to the exam are needed (a mini-practice analysis); 2) create new items to fill any gaps and mark for deletion any existing items that are no longer appropriate; 3) ask a different committee of subject matter experts (include some “fresh eyes”) to provide Angoff ratings estimating the difficulty of the new items; 4) add the new items to the exam, remove items marked for deletion, and calculate a new cut score based on the individual ratings for all items.  Although not the ideal, this procedure is probably acceptable for modifying the cut when all items have Angoff ratings.  A complicating factor is that the definition of the borderline candidate may not be exactly the same in the minds of the new committee and the committee that set the passing score on the original exam.  It helps if the new committee reviews the work of the original committee.

Incorporating the new items and their Angoff ratings into the exam becomes more complicated when your original passing score was set using the bookmark method.  However, I believe it could be done in a reasonable and defensible manner.  There would be increased emphasis on the final evaluations by the committee and also by the board in determining whether the cut appears to be reasonable.  In other words, more subjectivity is introduced into the final decision.

(Alternatively, an Angoff study could be done on the entire set of items, old and new, in the new exam.  This would be a more reliable and more defensible approach, even if no job analysis is done.)

I also noticed that the ABVS reviewers indicated a desire to provide more diagnostic information to candidates who failed one or more sections.  Psychometricians get a little nervous about reporting subscores, which are less reliable than full test scores simply because they are based on fewer items.  A general rule of thumb is that scores should not be reported on fewer than 10 items.  So if there is a minor content area tested by only five or six items, reporting a sub score on this area is generally frowned upon.  However, it is often possible to combine several small areas and report a score for the combined areas, providing a listing of the topics that make up the combined area.  Providing diagnostic information can be tricky, even when content area scores are reasonably reliable, because some content areas are much larger than others.  It is helpful to candidates if you can make it clear how each content area is weighted on the exam.  If a candidate scores 50%, for example, on a 10-question section and 60% on a 40-question area, the first inclination might be to study the area with a lower percentage score.  However, the candidate answered only five questions incorrectly in that area.  In the larger content area, he or she missed 16 questions.  Conceivably, the candidate could score 100% on the 10 question section next time and still not pass the exam.

I will share with you a link to the Examination and Measurement FAQ page of the CLEAR website.  You might find some helpful documents here or elsewhere on the CLEAR webiste.  Some resources are available only to CLEAR members, but others can be accessed by anyone.  Here is the link:  <http://www.clearhq.org/page-1393642>.

I hope you find this information helpful.  Please let me know if you have additional questions or would like to discuss it further.

Elizabeth

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**From:** ACPV [<mailto:support@acpv.info>]   
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2016 11:11 AM  
**To:** WittMeasure  
**Subject:** Advice Needed

Hi Elizabeth,

I hope you’re doing well and staying warm!

I was wondering if you could give us some advice regarding a comment we received from the American Board of Veterinary Specialties from our 5 year in depth report.  They are concerned that if the exam does not change in 6 years, will it exclude some new information that should be tested or changed?  My question to you—Is there a way to update the exam and keep a valid cut-score?  Is a way around this to have an addendum to the current exam with cutting edge questions that could have its own cut score?  If a regulation changes can a similar question with the new regulation replace it?

Thanks for any help you can give us.  And we will be HAPPY to pay you for your consult.

Thanks,

Janece

Janece Bevans-Kerr, Director of Member Services

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