

## Questions and Answers for the June 2010 webcast entitled *'How the national exams are developed and scored'*

June 23, 2010

Below are the questions and answers to questions submitted in the context of a webinar on the development and scoring of the national exams held on June 22, 2010.

- 1. Will there be a document of the q and a for this webinar and when should we expect it?*  
Yes. It will be posted within a week.
- 2. From my understanding, the exam results will be available on July 2, 2010. Does HRPA have a passing mark for the NKE?*  
No. Here is how it goes. CCHRA sets a date on which the exam results can be released. All of the provincial associations have agreed not to release any results before this date. The scores, the cut-score for the NKE and the NPPA, the pass rates for the NKE and the NPPA, will all be released at that same time. The individual results will be posted in the educational profile section of the member profile; the aggregate statistical results for the exam will be posted on the Exam Central page.
- 3. Can we get a copy of this presentation?*  
Yes. The webinar slides, a recording of the webinar, and the Q & A will all be posted.
- 4. What is the passing mark for the NKE?*  
This information will be posted on July 2nd. This information will be posted in the Exam Central page.
- 5. Do we know the pass rate yet?*  
This information will be posted on July 2nd. This information will be posted in the Exam Central page.
- 6. Where will you be posting it?*  
The cut-scores will be posted on the 'Exam Central' page.
- 7. Are the exams marked?*  
I am certain that the scoring of the exams is well underway at CCHRA. HRPA has not received any scores yet. CCHRA sets the date on which the exam results will be released and all the provincial associations agree not to release the results before that time.

8. *Why not use the median?*

I am assuming that you are referring to the Angoff index for each item. Using the median would have some advantages; for instance, the median is less impacted by extreme values (outliers). On the other hand the median does not yield a convenient measure of dispersion. Measures of dispersion are used as measures of inter-rater agreement.

9. *If every test is different, why are we not able to view our submitted test?*

Every form of the exams is different in that it is made up of a different combination of items; this does not mean that some items cannot be repeated at some time.

10. *If you fail is the test the same the next time you write it?*

The tests are different for each sitting; this does not mean that some items cannot be repeated at some time.

11. *Do you have any information on the pass rate of students who write after finishing the courses versus practitioners who have been out of school for many years?*

Below are the pass rates by tenure in HR. Again, I would suggest caution in interpreting the results. Although the 'no experience' group had a lower pass rate than the 0-3 years group, there may be different reasons for this difference.

October 2009 NKE Ontario	
Experience in HR	Pass rate
No experience	52.3%
0-3 years	60.4%
4-6 years	59.0%
7 to 9 years	54.7%
10 or more	48.0%
Total	57.1%

12. *How many items were deemed flawed in October 2009?*

Three items were deemed flawed for the NKE and none for the NPPA.

13. *Do you recommend taking the HRwrx prep course for the NKE exam?*

Making recommendations as to the best approach to prepare for the exam is always difficult. What will work for one individual may not work for another. I can tell you that most exam-writers find the opportunity to practice most beneficial.

14. *When you request for a manual rescore can you be present when it's performed? When and what is the process?*

No, you cannot be present. The process is straightforward; the Scantron sheet is retrieved and scored manually. Should there be a discrepancy between the manual rescore and the original score, the manual score would prevail. In such cases, the manual rescore fee would be refunded.

15. *When looking at a pass rate in 2009 of 57%, does this indicate to the Association that maybe the test was too hard?*

It is difficult to say what a pass rate ‘should’ be. This is why Angoff panels are used to set the cut-scores. The cut-scores are set before any individual writes the exam. Consider the table below for the exams administered by the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) our American counterparts. HRCI has four exams, the pass rates for each exam for each administration is published on the HRCI web site.

<b>Exam Date/Window</b>	<b>PHR Pass Rate</b>	<b>SPHR Pass Rate</b>	<b>GPHR Pass Rate</b>	<b>PHR-CA/SPHR-CA Pass Rate</b>
December 2001	67%	57%	N/A	N/A
May 2002	65%	53%	N/A	N/A
May 2003	65%	58%	N/A	N/A
December 2003	65%	57%	N/A	N/A
May - June 2004	67%	59%	N/A	N/A
November-December 2004	67%	60%	68%	N/A
May-June 2005	67%	58%	65%	N/A
December 2005-January 2006	64%	56%	69%	N/A
May-June 2006	64%	58%	70%	N/A
December 2006- January 2007	63%	55%	56%	N/A
May- June 2007	61%	58%	53%	N/A
California April & June 2007	N/A	N/A	N/A	71%
December 2007-January 2008	63%	57%	56%	72%
May-June 2008	60%	54%	64%	74%
December 2008-January 2009	59%	54%	66%	52%
May-June 2009	59%	52%	57%	53%
December 2009-January 2010	60%	53%	57%	61%
Mean	64%	56%	62%	64%

You can see that the average pass-rate for the SPHR exam is 56%, and has varied from a low of 52% to a high of 60%. The average pass rate for the NKE is 70%. Then again, it is not that having a pass rate that is similar to another test makes it right; what makes a cut-score right is the process that was used in establishing it.

16. *What statistics do you have on NKE writers that require re-writes?*

The maximum number of times that someone has written the NKE is seven times. We also know that average scores and pass-rates tend to be a bit lower for those who are re-writing the exam. See the answer to the next question.

17. *Is there statistical information between pass rates for 1st time NKE writers and multiple attempt exam writers?*

See the answer to the next question.

18. *Don't you feel a pass rate of 60-70% is low? and do individuals take the test multiple time is the pass rate higher?*

A pass rate of 60-70% seems to be in line with the experience of other credentialing organizations that run similar tests. No, the mean scores and the pass rates tend to decrease over multiple attempts at passing the NKE. This is an average however. This does not mean that someone who has failed the NKE and worked hard to address weak areas cannot improve their score and pass the exam. The data below were compiled in July of 2009.

NKE Attempt	Number	Mean Score	Pass Rate
First	5497	.74	.71
Second	599	.67	.42
Third	137	.67	.37
Fourth	33	.66	.30
Fifth	9	.65	.11
Sixths	3	.72	.67
Seventh	1	.72	1.0

19. *When 57 % only passed in Oct. 2009, is the May 2010 NKE developed to be easier to have more writers pass?*

No. Certification and licensure tests are meant to present a consistent standard across forms. Manipulating the cut-score to achieve a targeted pass rate would be improper.

20. *Referring back to the reliability of the test questions. If we come across a question with an obsolete answer - how would we approach this? (Should we answer the question or skip it?)*

Be careful here; just because you feel that a question is ambiguous or obsolete does not mean that it is. Before an item is included on an exam, it is reviewed by the Independent Board of Examiners; after a test is administered every item is reviewed based on its statistical performance. It does happen that items are deemed to be flawed upon review; and it could be that this is one of the items that you thought was flawed. But then again, it might not be. My advice would be not to take a chance and answer every question. You can send us an email with the question and we will pass it on to CCHRA.

21. *Do we have an opportunity to bring forward questions we may have found to be flawed/unclear? If so, how?*

You can send us an email with a description of the item you felt was unclear. We will pass along that information to CCHRA.

22. *Is there an average number of flawed questions that are removed from the NKE? (not May 2010)*

Up until May 2010, the questions were not removed from the exams; rather an adjustment was made to the raw scores. In between September 2003 and October 2009, the adjustments have varied from +2 to +13 for the NKE and from +0 to +17 for the NPPA.

23. *I currently work in I work in an isolated area, are there online or distance courses offered to assist in preparation for the NKE?*

Yes, the HRPAs own HRwrx is an online program, the CCHRA/Captus Press program is also an online program.

24. *Is there compensation given to people who experience power outages while writing exams?*

It depends on the length of the power outage. Test proctors are empowered to use their judgment in making such decisions. Whenever something of that nature happens, the proctors make note of it. If you believe that a power outage has hindered your performance on an exam, you must let HRPAs know before the results are out. Once the results are out, such claims will not be entertained.

25. *Will there be another webinar after the results are out to discuss some of the questions that are being asked today in specific regard to the NKE in May 2010?*

No, at least we hadn't planned on it. We wanted to do the webinar before exam-writers got their results. There would be nothing new that this webinar wouldn't have covered.

26. *Will the Angoff panel items cut score published?*

Yes.

27. *When we receive our scores on July 2, will we also be told what the cut score was or simply whether we passed or failed?*

Both. Your score and whether it was a pass or a fail will be posted in the educational profile section of your member profile. The cut scores and the aggregate statistical results will be posted in the 'Exam Central' page.

28. *Why is there such wide variability in test scores over time? It looks like it is better to write in May as one is more likely to pass. Has this variability been analyzed? This variability seems like a significant problem.*

Actually, the average pass rate on the NKE for May sittings is .64 and the average pass rate for October sittings is .68. The problem is that there are significant differences in the make-up of different cohorts. For instance, many exam-writers without degrees are pushing hard to pass the NKE before the degree requirement deadline.

29. *Would you know if the challenge exams are also in the same multiple choice format as the NKE? The challenge exams are mostly multiple-choice, but there remains a few with mixed format (multiple-choice and short-essay).*

30. *If I am writing the NKE this year (October) and I am able to write the second part without a university degree?*

If you pass the NKE in October, you will be exempted from the degree requirement. The 'second part' is not an exam, however, but the documentation of at least three years of experience at a professional level in HR.

31. *Why do they say passing score is 70% when really it's floating?*

Up until May 2010, the cut-score was a fixed at 70%. Adjustments were made to the scores to make this work out. Starting with the May 2010 exams, CCHRA will no longer use a fixed cut-score. Instead of making adjustments to the scores, the cut-score will be allowed to 'float.'

32. *What is the date in July for the next broadcast? is it July 13 or July 2?*

July 2nd is the release of the exam results; July 13th is the next webinar on the exam policies, processes, and procedures.

33. *If a scoring error is found upon request for a manual rescoring, is the fee for the manual rescoring fee returned to the exam writer? If not, how is this rationalized?*

Yes, it would be.

34. *How many were deemed flawed in October 2009?*

Three for the NKE, none for the NPPA.

35. *Why will a degree requirement be mandatory in 2011 to receive your full designation?*

The degree requirement was added because it was felt that this level of qualification was necessary to ensure that human resources professionals certified by HRPA had the generic skills necessary to perform at a professional level.

36. *Would you happen to know the cut score of the NKE written in the Fall, 2009?*  
Yes, for all administrations of the NKE and the NPPA before May 2010, the cut-score was fixed at 70%.
37. *Where is the NKE to be taken and how much time to write the exam do we get?*  
The NKE is administered at 30 sites across Ontario. By special arrangement, the NKE can also be written in other provinces and in many other international locations as well. The duration of the NKE is three hours.
38. *Is the Angoff used instead of a Standard error of measurement score and if not is that considered in the results?*  
The Angoff method and the standard error of measurement are not alternatives for one another. What you may be referring to is the idea of backing off the cut-score in order to increase the probability that no one that should pass the test actually fails the test due to measurement error. These are called false negatives. Unfortunately, there is a trade-off here—reducing false negatives will increase false positives. If we give equal weight to false negatives and false positives, the optimal placement of the cut-score is right at the value established by the Angoff panel.
39. *Is exam on Oct 1 or Oct 2, 2010? there are 2 dates online.*  
The National Knowledge Exam (NKE) is on Saturday, October 2, 2010. The registration deadline is August 3, 2010.
40. *If you don't pass the May 1, 2010 NKE is it worthwhile to write it again in October. Will it be possible to meet the deadline for the CHRP designation?*  
The degree exemption will apply to all those who will have passed the NKE before December 31, 2010. As far as being worthwhile, that is a decision only you can make. Of those who failed the NKE the first time around, 42% will pass on the second attempt.
41. *Will the NPPA be substituted by another exam?*  
No. Now that the NPPA is no longer used by HRP, the only way of meeting the experience requirement is to demonstrate three years of professional experience in HR by means of the validation of experience process.
42. *Is the NKE different for each person depending on your experience?*  
For a given sitting, the NKE is the same for all exam-writers.
43. *How can one person pass and one fail if they have the same test score?*  
This can happen because of rounding. For illustrative purposes, let's assume that two items are deemed flawed and discarded.

The cut score starts as a raw score – the number of items that must be answered correctly. We start with the sum of Angoff item indices. It is unlikely that the raw cut score will compute to an

integer. More likely, the cut score will be similar to 99.65 or some other fractional number. Since exam writers cannot attain a raw score in the form of a fractional number, the raw cut score is rounded upward—that is, an exam-writer with a score of 100 would pass the exam, an exam-writer with a score of 99 would fail the exam. A score of 100 out of 148 corresponds to 67.6% which rounds to 68%. A score of 99 out of 148 corresponds to 66.9% which rounds to 67%. Expressed as a percentage, the cut-score would be 68%.

This gets trickier if, for example, the raw cut-score is 100.65. In this example, it would round to 101, producing a percentage cut-score that also rounds to 68%. However, in reporting exam-writer scores as rounded percentages, we want to avoid having two candidates with the same rounded percentage score where one passes while the other fails. Therefore, if two raw scores equal the same rounded percentage cut score, we use the lower of the two. Consider an exam-writer with a score of 100. This converts to a rounded percentage score of 68%. Here, both scores of 100 and 101 convert to the same rounded percentage score of 68%. If we say that the cut-score is 68%, it is difficult to explain why an exam-writer with a raw score of 100 would fail whereas an exam-writer with a raw score of 101 would pass although both have rounded percentage scores of 68%.

In this example, if the raw cut score is 100.65 of 148 items, the final cut score would be 100, as the lower cut score being equal to 68%.

44. *I missed the first 30 mins. of this due to a meeting, can you explain cut scores in a nutshell (sorry for any duplication).*

Starting with the October 2009 exams, CCHRA has been using Angoff panels to set cut scores on its exams. Starting with the May 2010 exams, CCHRA will no longer make adjustments to the scores in order to keep the cut-score at a constant 70%. Going-forward the cut-score will be allowed to 'float' reflecting the relative difficulty of the test.

45. *Where can I find the information and applications to register for the Oct exam?*

The HRP A Certification Handbook, which can be downloaded from the HRP A website, has all the information on registering for the October exam.

46. *The pass rate in October last year at 57% seems low - why would that be?*

There are two possible reasons: (1) the exam was harder than previous exams, and/or (2) exam-writers were not as well prepared as some previous cohorts have been.

47. *There is still a significant difference in what is taught - depends on school/teacher or course taken in class or on line. There is such a disconnect between what is taught and what is tested? Is the association looking to standardize what is taught?*

HRP A approves courses based on a match of course content to standard outlines as well as other criteria. This is about as far as HRP A can go. To a great extent, within the boundaries of these standard outlines, instructors are free to emphasize those topics they feel should be emphasized.

48. *What was the passing rate for the NPPA?*

We don't know yet.

49. *What is the best way to prepare for NKE?*

I do not know whether there is a best way. Adult learning theorists would say that there are different learning styles. Do make sure that you include practice with multiple-choice exams, however.

50. *What is the timeline for the Oct NKE registration?*

The National Knowledge Exam (NKE) is on October 2, 2010. The registration deadline is August 3, 2010. There is a late registration deadline of August 6, 2010.

51. *On the NPPA, there were many questions where there were 2 acceptable answers. What criteria or viewpoint should be used to determine the right answer?*

Actually, all four options could be 'acceptable' answers. One option is identified by the NPPA panel as the most appropriate response—it is a judgment made by the NPPA panel.

52. *How does the item analysis identify issues with the context in which an item was written?*

Not quite sure what is meant by the question. A key aspect of item analysis is to compare performance on a given item with performance on the test as a whole. Item analysis does not look at 'context' it looks at actual item performance.

53. *Hi, I wrote the NKE in May. I graduated over 7 years ago and have been working in the field at a senior level since. I studied extensively using old textbooks and bought the HRwrx package and did well in the practice exams, I was confident going into the exam, however after writing it I felt as though it was very text book based and had a lot of material on it that I didn't review or that I was familiar with. This is a good approach for new graduates but for the rest of the writers it seemed foreign, and my original confidence going in deteriorated quickly. Is there any way to find a happy medium for future exams? If not what would recommend to help prepare for the exam better? I am a College graduate so October will be my last chance before having to receive a degree in order to obtain my CHRP should I not pass. This creates a lot of pressure for someone in my position.*

We need to go back to the construct definition here. The construct that the NKE is tapping is "Academic knowledge defined as the basic facts, policies, practices, methods, legislation, etc. It is information that can be written into procedures and transferred fairly accurately during the learning process." Given this, it is not surprising that the NKE is somewhat 'bookish.' The list of academic knowledge RPCs® is also published.

54. *How often do re-scores actually show that the person in face passed the test but had received a fail before the manual re-score?*

Very rarely. The HRP Office of the Registrar staff can recall only one instance where this happened, and that was years ago.

55. *I wrote the NKE in May 2010. Is the cut-score known at this time? Can you share with us?*  
 The IBE does have a preliminary value for the cut-score based on the Angoff panel ratings. This preliminary cut-score was known to the IBE before the exam was even administered. However, as described in the webinar today, the final cut-score will depend which items were discarded, if any, as the cut-score is recalculated based on retained items.
56. *WHAT IS THE CUT SCORE FOR THE MAY 2010 NKE EXAM?*  
 I don't know. This information will be released at the same time as the scores for the exam.
57. *Was the May 1, 2010 exam a fixed cut-score?*  
 No. The cut-score was established using the procedure described in the webinar.
58. *What's the IBE?*  
 IBE stands for Independent Board of Examiners.
59. *Those that are successful on the NKE, will information be available for the next step?*  
 Yes. Also, all the information you are ever likely to need is published in the HRPA Certification Handbook, which can be downloaded from the HRPA web site.
60. *I notice that there are no accounting requirements in the functional domains-should we ignore this portion of what we learned in terms of writing the exam?*  
 No. Although 'accounting' does not appear as a functional domain, it does appear in a number of RPCs®. For instance:

RPC: 25	Applies principles of project management to HR activities.
RPC:27	Monitors expenditures and timelines.
RPC:128	Provides for delivery of payroll services in compliance with applicable legislation, company policy and advises the organization on related matters.
RPC:130	Performs an analysis of organizational and employee needs related to benefit plans.
RPC:134	Integrates the basic benefit programs with disability management.
RPC:142	Ensures accurate and timely delivery of pay.

61. *Is there a relation between academic scores and NKE exam scores?*  
 That is a difficult question to answer. The problem is that there are big differences between educational institutions in their pass rates on the NKE (you will remember from the presentation that such differences were the reason why a knowledge exam was introduced in 1994). A 75% in one educational institution does not seem to equate to a 75% in another educational institution.
62. *Do you get a certificate once certified?*  
 Yes. Images of our certificate are posted online.

63. *Why does it take so long to process and post exam marks?*

HRPA would also like to see the exams processed and scored as quickly as is possible. There are a number of steps in processing and scoring the exams including initial scoring, review of item performance by the IBE and final scoring.

64. *Do you think they will ever make Project Management a required course to write the NKE?*

That is a question I really can't answer; but let me describe how it would come about if it were to come about. The required curriculum for the CHRP is determined by the Professional Regulation and Standards Committee. Indeed, there is a task force right now that is looking at the required curriculum for the CHRP. This Committee could recommend that project management be added as a required course. Of course, whenever there is a proposal to change the required curriculum, it is necessary to give educational institutions the time to develop the courses—so it won't happen overnight.

65. *How many items were flawed in the 2009 NKE?*

Three.

66. *Since the CHRP is a nationally recognized designation, shouldn't there be a national standard in achieving the CHRP? Shouldn't all the provinces use the same exams—NKE and NPPA?*

A key idea here is what is meant by 'standard.' If 'national standard' is taken to mean that all provinces must have identical certification processes, then such a 'national standard' is impossible; this is because the legislative framework is different across provinces making this kind of standard impossible. Rather, what we have is a standard of competence rather than a process standard. The issue with the NPPA was that there was a danger that its continued use would erode the value of the designation. Over and over again, we were hearing comments such as *"It just doesn't make sense that someone just out of school can write two multiple-choice exams and get the designation without any experience in HR."* We conducted a Pulse survey with Canadian HR Reporter on the possibility of returning to an experience requirement as it was before the NPPA was introduced—79.5% of respondents were of the opinion that re-introducing an experience requirement would enhance the value of the designation, and 77.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that their provincial association should add an experience requirement to the CHRP. The HRPA Board of Directors did consider the implications of re-introducing an experience requirement. At the end of the day, maintaining the credibility and value of the CHRP designation was seen as more important than going along with the other provinces (it could be noted here that Quebec never did use the NPPA).