

National designation should raise HR bar
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This summer, members of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Association voted to accept a new national standard for the designation of certified human resource professional, CHRP.

The first people to apply for the new CHRP will be writing the exams by March 2003. The 11,000 professionals who currently hold a CHRP designation are safely grandfathered but will eventually have to be recertified.

It's a stunning achievement in many respects, not least of all because it also includes Quebec/ Lawyers face considerable hurdles when they want to hang their shingle in another province, though work is being done to ease those restrictions. Engineers are strictly provincially licensed, as well. And as it stands now, the criteria for receiving the CHRP differs fairly substantially from province to province, and even within each province.

Anne Charette, who chaired the national standards steering committee, is excited and proud, saying it's significant for all HR professionals. "By raising the bar, this is going to make the designation far more popular."

Most involved in a national certification process also see the marketing angle for the profession as a whole. Susan Pander certainly does. She is president of the Saskatchewan Council of HR Associations, and has been involved with the CCHRA for four years. "There's going to be a big kick off to the launch. We want all HR professionals to be proud, but we also want their employers to be proud."

Pander says eventually, in her lifetime, she'd like the designation to be as familiar and respected as a CMA. "Right now we aren't a licensing body, just a certifying one, but we want it well known," she says.

Today, those outside the HR world don't know that hiring someone with a CHRP means they are getting someone who adheres to a strict code of conduct with high standards. "They are assured of getting good HR methods and practice in the workplace," Pander says.

Created back in 1995, the CCHRA is made up of representatives of provincial and specialist HR associations. Its mandate was to create a national certification process.

Each province doles out the certification differently. In Ontario, there are several routes to certification. One method is to complete eight approved courses, pass

the comprehensive provincial exam, and have 36 months cumulative HR experience at the professional/managerial level.

Another way is to complete the advanced program in HR management at the University of Toronto plus the three years' experience. And as of September 2000, a candidate could write the exam, in lieu of the eight advanced program courses, and be assessed and accepted as a senior practitioner with more than 10 years of experience at the professional/managerial level.

On the other hand, in Saskatchewan if you don't have the educational component, years of experience alone can garner a CHRP. It, like many provinces, requires no exam.

Under the national certification process, there will be two different exams to write. The first will be a knowledge-based test that Pander says will cover major areas like recruitment, labour relations, and organizational behavior – the kind of things applicants will know coming out of university or from a book. Each province can put in questions on provincial legislation regarding occupational health and safety and employment standards.

Within three years of writing that test, candidates must complete an "outcomes" exam, where they'll be expected to take their years of experience and apply them to scenarios and case studies. It's being designed to test the depth and breadth of your HR experience, says Charette.

Both exams will be multiple choice, and computer marked. A pass mark of 70 per cent is required.

"The testing will be a far more objective process," says Charette. "We have question writers – senior HR practitioners – from across the country."

Dr. Vic Catano, of St. Mary's University in Halifax, who literally wrote the book on testing, lead the exam and capabilities task force. "We were really pleased to get Dr. Catano. It was a real coup, because he has so much experience in this area," says Charette.

The knowledge test questions are completed and the outcome based questions will be finished by December, she says.

All current CHRP holders will have until 2006 to complete their first recertification. For member of Ontario and Quebec this will be something new as once they receive their CHRP they have it for life. "Recertification is needed to maintain the benchmark," says Charette. "However, the recertification process, which hasn't been finalized, will not be terribly onerous. The idea is not to take away anyone's designation but rather encourage professional development."

Recertifying will be done every three years on a point system. For example, attending an HR conference earns so many points, while taking a course or implementing a new program at work would be worth other points, still to be decided.

“If you haven’t done anything to move your education or professional development forward you might not get your certificate,” says Pander, who is head of HR at SaskTel.

Pander says there were some bumps along the way among each province, especially over exams, the educational component, and recertification. Ultimately, consensus was reached because of the importance of having national standards and getting a designation that’s “transferable, portable and good for the whole country.”

In January, the heretofore virtual CCHRA will open a professional standards office, in Toronto. It will be located down the hall from the Human Resource Professionals Association of Ontario, but completely independent. The sole staff member is still to be hired. “We are excited to finally have a home after all the hard work,” says Charette. Charette, who was part of the Ontario contingent, says it’ll be an adjustment for some, although not a shock as they’ve been communicating this for over six months. “They got exams, and we have to recertify. Overall it raises the bar for the profession by so much and that is the goal.”