

From: Chris Hipkins <[Chris.Hipkins@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:Chris.Hipkins@parliament.govt.nz)>

Date: Wed, Oct 5, 2016 at 2:17 PM

Subject: RE: 2016 Level 1 MCAT

To: Holly Rickit

Dear Holly,

I believe NZQA need to look very carefully at what happened in this case. When maths teachers up and down the country are raising concerns about the level and difficulty of the exam, that's something that should be taken seriously. I'm no maths expert, but if NZQA does find issues with the level the exam has been pitched at then they will need to consider carefully how to achieve a fair outcome for the kids concerned. That might include offering them the chance to sit a different exam. This case highlights the pressure that kids are being placed under to achieve NCEA. It's more 'high stakes' than it has ever been. There is far too much emphasis on learning as preparation for assessment rather than a well-rounded, broadly based education. It's well past time to look at over-assessment in senior schooling. Today's kids are the most tested and assessed in New Zealand's history and that's putting them under enormous pressure and narrowing down the focus and value of the education they receive.

Kind regards,

**Chris Hipkins**

**MP for Rimutaka**

**Opposition Chief Whip**

**Shadow Leader of the House**

**Labour Party spokesperson for Education**

Parliament Buildings, Wellington

Phone: [+64 4 817 6584](tel:+6448176584)

Web: [www.chrishopkins.org.nz](http://www.chrishopkins.org.nz)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/chrishopkinsmp](https://www.facebook.com/chrishopkinsmp)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/chrishopkins](https://www.twitter.com/chrishopkins)

#### **This was in response to Holly's Email:**

**From:** Holly Rickit

**Sent:** Tuesday, 4 October 2016 12:09 p.m.

**To:** Chris Hipkins

**Subject:** 2016 Level 1 MCAT

Good afternoon Chris,

I am emailing you as the Shadow Minister of Education as something needs to be done regarding the NCEA Level 1 MCAT which was sat in September and Hekia Parata appears to be doing nothing! This is not alright as something outrageous has been done which is going to effect the wellness and academic progression of this years Level 1 maths students for years to come.

Below are the specific reasons why this external was not appropriate in any way shape or form. I am looking forward to hearing your response as to what is going to happen from here as a result of this outrageous paper.

Q1ai which is the very first questions. This should be a question which is accessible to most. This was not! This could so easily have been 2a or 2d.

The amount of space left for 1aii. This was hugely misleading to anyone sitting the paper. There were 15 lines to write and the answer took me 3 lines. Is this done to purposefully confuse the students? In which case, how is this assessing their ability to use algebraic methods to solve problems?

1b is the only simultaneous equation question and it had language that would make it difficult for any student to access. There was also a lack of space given for the work that is required to solve the problem.

1c was more difficult than the 'parallel' question on Day 2. How is this fair?

1d was much more difficult than the examples given in the standard which stated: 'solve simple equations involving exponents'. While individual parts were at the correct curriculum level the combination is higher level thinking.

2a was harder than day 2 as day 2 did not test the skill of squaring.

2b Having  $x - 2$  on both sides on Day 1 made it harder than Day 2 where there wasn't a common factor. In Day 1 students would be tempted to divide both sides by  $x - 2$  to get  $2 > 3$ . Are we trying to trick the students or assess their knowledge and understanding?

2c is an exponential inequation. The standard allows for linear inequations and solving simple equations using exponents not exponential inequations. Why did they have to have yet another twist with  $123/6$  not being a whole number answer?

2e was an almost identical question to an Excellence question in the 2014 Level 2 Algebra exam (Q2bii). We would not even contemplate this could be in the Level 1 paper. The Day 1 paper has an answer of square root of 8 which is harder than the Day 2 paper that factorised 'nicely'.

2fi was given in the most inaccessible form. Why not  $4x - x^2$  instead of  $-(x^2 - 4x)$ . Considerably more difficult form given than Day 2 which was  $x^2 - 4x$

2fii was a quadratic inequality to solve (the front page of the paper stated guess and check 'will not be used as evidence of solving a problem') This is clearly not in the standard which states: 'solving linear equations' and 'solving quadratic equations' NOT solving quadratic inequations. Why did the % need to be asked?

3a had too many trivial answers like 1 and  $x^2 + 4x - 12$ . The second rectangle question - couldn't another context be given so students who couldn't access Q1ai weren't penalised twice?

3d This is a very lengthy investigation if you don't 'happen upon' using a, b, c, d for part ii. Since it was part ii, students may have assumed (from part i) that the investigation was of odd numbers so used  $2x-1$ ,  $2x+1$ ,  $2x+3$ ,  $2x+5$  or something similar. Or they could have assumed it was investigate the numbers given which could correctly be stated as  $x$ ,  $x+2$ ,  $x+3$ ,  $x+5$ . Or it could have been any numbers. In an investigation of this nature, enough time should be given to investigate thoroughly. It would take at least 30 minutes. One question in a 60 minute, 20 question paper should not take this amount of time.

An apology needs to be made from NZQA to our students, their parents and their teachers. It is not appropriate that NZQA can get away with writing such an outrageous paper. There is no way that if a school submitted this for moderation that it would be accepted so why can NZQA?

Nothing will make up for what has happened, but NZQA openly admitting that they made a mistake and apologising for it will go a long way with the students, parents and teachers that this has affected. Be a good role model!

There are a lot of unsure students around NZ expecting similar exams now from all their subjects at the end of the year. This was their very first NZQA external and what a rubbish one it was. They need reassurance that none of their end of year exams will be like this!

Holly Hueston  
Maths teacher and concerned New Zealander  
446 Hutt Road  
Wellington 5010