

23 September 2016

Jake Wills
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Dear Jake

Thank you for your communication about the 2016 Mathematics Common Assessment Task (MCAT). I understand your concern that students found this year's MCAT difficult despite their study and preparation. This is the first external assessment for most year 11 students and it can be a stressful experience.

NZQA advised schools of a further change to the assessment for 2016 in the 2016 Assessment Specifications (May update), which stated:

"In any of the level 1 external assessments, candidates may be expected to demonstrate evidence through a simple investigation. This may involve the investigation of an algebraic, statistical, or geometric relationship, and begin with a word problem or situation."

I acknowledge that the normal processes (An initial circular in November 2015 and a further circular in May 2016) for communicating the changes to the assessment task to better align it with the requirements of the standard did not adequately ensure that all teachers received the required information about the changes. We recognise therefore, that some students understandably found it difficult when faced with an assessment that was different from what they expected. We will ensure that we work more closely with teachers and subject associations in the future so that we can better support teachers with communication.

The MCAT assessments have been increasingly including questions similar to the ones in the 2016 assessment in which the use of algebraic procedures is assessed through contextual questions requiring a problem-solving approach, rather than assessing recall of skills. The MCAT assessment this year was developed by an experienced team of teachers. It was then reviewed by two further teachers who had not been involved in the original setting process.

As part of the normal marking process, a benchmarking process is carried out to confirm that all correct candidate responses are provided for in the assessment schedule, and to ensure national consistency from year to year. Over 1000 student scripts were considered in this process and the assessment schedule was, as is the case for every national examination, amended appropriately. In 2016 this process was no different from that used in earlier years for the MCAT, and the extent of adjustments to the schedules is consistent with previous years.

If you have any further concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Kristine Kilkelly
Deputy Chief Executive, Assessment