

27 September 2016

Bruce Welsh
President
Wellington Mathematics Association
maths@welsh.co.nz

Dear Bruce

Thank you for your letter which you provided at our meeting on 20 September alerting us to the concerns of Wellington schools about the 2016 MCAT assessment. I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with you and other representatives of WMA to talk face to face about the issues as they affect teachers and students. We appreciated the frank and constructive discussion.

We note your summary of larger issues associated with this year's MCAT. There is no doubt that the MCAT is seen as very important to Mathematics teachers because of the fundamental role algebra plays in future Mathematics study and for STEM subjects generally. We want to support schools in the work they are doing to encourage students into STEM. For students, the fact that the MCAT was their first NCEA external assessment has meant that they will have attached particular importance to it and we understand teacher concerns that this assessment needs to be a good experience for students.

You have sought clarification on what level the other three externals are pitched at. We believe that schools will find the examination papers for the other level 1 Mathematics and Statistics standards to be in line with the achievement standards, and consistent with their expectations and recent previous assessment of those standards.

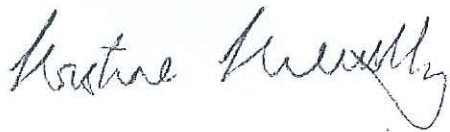
NZQA fully acknowledges that the process we followed for communication of changes in the style and format of questions in the 2016 MCAT was not adequate to ensure that schools were well informed about the changes. We want to get this right in future and to ensure that our future communications are informed by what works for schools and teachers. Thank you for your suggestions in this regard and particularly what we need to do by way of better exemplification of signalled changes to assessment questions. We will make sure this is part of future changes.

You proposed in your letter providing schools with an option of a derived grade. It is important that we continue with the marking process for MCAT and we believe that this is in the best interests of students and schools. The derived grade process is not designed for this situation and it is important for the overall fairness of external assessment that there is a consistent and careful use of this provision.

You also asked whether a review of the standard is possible. The Ministry of Education is the standard setting body for standards derived from the New Zealand Curriculum. I will refer your request to the Ministry who will get back to you direct once they have considered this.

We are very supportive of the work of subject associations, and as I said when we met last week, we would be keen to work with you on ways that we can improve our information and communications, and support for Mathematics teachers. Thank you for taking the time to come in last week and to talk through the concerns that members have expressed on this year's MCAT.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kristine Kilkelly', written in a cursive style.

Kristine Kilkelly
Deputy Chief Executive, Assessment