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Dear Kristine,

The 2016 mCAT was discussed informally at our executive meeting for September. A number of concerns discussed meant a survey was warranted. A summary of the questions and general responses are given below. The stand-out issue from the survey was the level appropriateness of some of the questions. These have been pointed out by associations and teachers already. The CMA accepts the test was just within the ball-park of what was expected; however communication between teachers and NZQA could have been better. It must also be noted that a test that drew so much negative media coverage cannot be good for NZQA and teachers as a whole; hopefully different processes can be put in place for next year to avoid media inspection.

The survey was completed by 65 Mathematics teachers in the Canterbury area.

"How did you feel about the updated format of this year's mCAT?"

90% of those surveyed felt they were unprepared for the changes seen in the paper. Many listed communication with NZQA an issue that could have lessened the impact.

"Were you adequately prepared for the changes compared to last year's mCAT?"

2% had their students to a capable level; 13% mostly ready; 56% somewhat ready, 34% were not ready at all. It was stated that exemplars of the changes were not available; however some felt their students were ready for the "problem-solving"; other questions caused issue.

"How did you find the overall level of difficulty of the questions in this year's mCAT?"

13% found it good or basically equivalent to last year; though 87% found the level hard. Poorly worded and questions at Level 2 were the main issues.

"Were your students appropriately prepared with the resources they had available?"

26% were happy with what they had available in their textbooks, 73% were not. Again lack of exemplars caused the issue; some schools found the Cambridge test papers a good way to get ready.

"Did you feel the space provided on the test paper reflected the working out required?"

This was basically 50 / 50. It was stated Question 1 may have had too much space which may have caused confusion to what needed to be written.

"Did you feel the mCAT covered all the algebraic skills needed at level 1?"

62% felt it did not; many comments suggested too much basis quadratics and factorising; the students didn't get a chance to show other skills they may have had.

"How did you feel about the investigative question at the end?"

The comments about this part of the test were extremely negative, especially in regards to the time allowance and specifically what it required a student to do.

I hope this sheds more light on teacher experiences with this year's paper. The CMA executive do not see the follow-up to the mCAT a "witch hunt" of any sort; but like many other teachers we are worried about the general quality of this assessment compared to other years. Previous year mCAT's have been rigorous in their assessment of Level 1 algebra and have been a good reflection on the abilities of our students. We hope this test is somewhat of an anomaly in terms of content and the communication of that content.

Kristian Giles

Secretary for the CMA