

15 November 2006

Stella Ward
NZSTA President
Suite 369, 63 Remuera Road
Newmarket
AUCKLAND

Dear Ms Ward

Thank you for your letter of 27 October 2006.

You state that the New Zealand Speech Language Therapist Association (NZSTA) is applying for inclusion in the Mutual Recognition of Credential Agreements (MRA) held between the American Language Hearing Association, the Canadian Association of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists, the Royal College of Speech Language Therapists and the Speech Pathology Association of Australia Limited. I understand that you require documented evidence that the NZSTA is the recognised authority for setting and applying speech-language therapist certification standards in New Zealand and have requested a letter from me regarding this.

Role of the Commissioner

The Health and Disability Commissioner is an independent statutory body. The Commissioner's role is to promote and protect the rights of health and disability consumers as set out in the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights (the Code) a regulation under the Health and Disability Commissioner Act (the Act). The Act and Code are concerned with how health and disability services are delivered and the quality of service provision in New Zealand.

Establishment of professional standards

The Code is not, and should not be, the primary mechanism for the establishment of standards. Right 4 of the Code is intended to provide a means by which standards set by other bodies can be enforced. Ultimately the responsibility for establishing and maintaining quality standards should lie with the relevant profession. When an issue of standards is involved the Commissioner usually seeks expert advice from a practitioner in that field of practice. The Commissioner may also seek information from a recognised authority and make reference to relevant written standards and guidelines where these are available.

Role of NZSTA

I can confirm that the NZSTA is a professional body for speech-language therapists that the Commissioner may refer to for guidance when a complaint raises issues about a speech-language therapist. If a complaint involved a concern about the standard of care provided by a speech-therapist, the Commissioner would usually seek information from the NZSTA regarding professional and ethical standards.

Since 1996, it appears that only 4 complaints have been received by the HDC about speech-language therapists and only one has been formally investigated. The NZSTA co-operated with my enquires and assisted appropriately in the resolution of these complaints.

I trust this is of some assistance. I wish you well in your application for the inclusion in the mutual recognition of credentials agreement.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Sladden
Acting Health and Disability Commissioner