

**Extract from the minutes of meeting of the
Panel on Education held on 17 November 2003**

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V. Introduction of an adjustment mechanism for the special allowance under the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme
[LC Paper No. CB(2)311/03-04(01)]

51. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) (DS(EM)5) briefed members on the proposed adjustment mechanism for the special allowance under the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme which, subject to the views of members, would be implemented from the 2004-05 school year.

52. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for the NET Scheme and the proposed adjustment mechanism in the Administration's paper. He, however, expressed concern whether the introduction of an adjustment mechanism would have a negative effect on recruitment and retention of NETs in the long run. He also asked whether future adjustments of the special allowance would be made on an annual basis.

53. DS(EM)5 responded that currently the retention rate was high with about three out of every four NETs continuing on a second contract. On recruitment of NETs, EMB had commissioned an overseas agency to recruit potential NETs and established a supply queue of quality NETs. He considered that the remuneration package approved by the Finance Committee in 1997 was attractive to NETs. He explained that NETs were being remunerated at a salary level based on qualifications and experience comparable to that for local teachers in Hong Kong. In addition, they were eligible for a monthly non-accountable special allowance on the condition that their ordinary residence was outside Hong Kong. The special allowance, currently set at HK\$13,000 per month, provided an incentive to attract qualified NETs. With the proposed adjustment mechanism, the rate of special allowance would be adjusted annually based on the yearly percentage change of the local private housing rental index. DS(EM)5 added that the adjustment mechanism would enable EMB to make adjustments to reflect the change in cost for accommodation in Hong Kong in the future.

54. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for the NET Scheme and the proposed adjustment mechanism in the paper. She considered that effective NETs would upgrade the quality of English teaching in schools and asked whether the Administration would consider expanding the NET Scheme when there was a supply queue of quality NETs. She also asked whether the Administration would review the operation of the adjustment mechanism if there should be difficulties in recruitment and retention of NETs in the future.

55. DS(EM)5 responded that the Administration would review the NET

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Scheme on a continuous basis. He pointed out that the Administration had allocated substantial resources to the provision of NETs to public sector secondary schools in 1997 and extended the NET Scheme to public sector primary schools in the 2002-03 school year. The performance of NETs in secondary schools had already been evaluated and the Administration would evaluate the results of the NETs in primary schools at a later stage to decide the way forward.

56. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the NET Scheme. He also expressed support for the proposed mechanism for annual adjustments of the special allowance for NETs on the conditions that the current turnover rate of NETs remained stable, the recruitment of NETs was reasonably secure, and EMB would consult NETs and their staff associations on the proposed mechanism. He said that the Administration should consult the Panel should there be any changes in the turnover rate and recruitment of NETs and problems in communication with NETs.

57. Mr SZETO Wah and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung urged the EMB to maintain close communications with NETs through various channels. Mr SZETO considered that EMB should encourage NETs to establish a staff union to represent their views and interests. He added that many NETs were members of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU). He suggested that EMB might seek the assistance of HKPTU in its future consultation exercises.

58. DS(EM)5 responded that apart from the NETs' Association, EMB would consult serving NETs through various channels including the parent-teacher associations of schools.

59. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the provision of one to two NETs for each secondary school and the sharing of one NET between two primary schools were inadequate for upgrading the quality of English teaching in schools. He asked whether EMB would review the situation and work out a long term strategy for the provision of NETs in schools.

60. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB had conducted a comprehensive review of the NET Scheme in secondary schools and proposed a number of measures to strengthen the scheme through effective deployment and revised recruitment processes. The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) was commissioned to evaluate the secondary NET scheme and had informed the way forward. EMB had commissioned an international tertiary institute working in collaboration with HKIED to undertake a systematic evaluation on the performance of the primary NET scheme. He assured members that the Administration would revert to the Panel when the evaluation report was available.

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