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May 25, 2005

To: The Legislative Council Panel on Education

From: NESTA Special Allowance & Gratuity Committee
Native English-speaking Teachers' Association

Purpose

Our Committee representing the teachers who work for the Hong Kong NET Scheme request the following:

- The NET Scheme Special Allowance be raised to \$15,000 per month
- NET's who signed contracts for the 2004/2005 period have their Special Allowance reinstated to \$13000 retroactively from August 2004
- A fair, accurate assessment mechanism for the annual review of the Special Allowance be set up. This should not be based solely on the CPI, but should take into account the actual expenses that expatriates in Hong Kong face, including a rental index for non-owners and education fees.
- The NET gratuity be increased to 25%.
- Long service payment be automatically made at the end of 5 years' service. Payment to be calculated, by the flowing formula - the final month's salary x 2/3 x 5. This should be in addition to the gratuity.

We seek your approval for the above in consideration of:

- Tenant rental costs
- CPI - food, electricity, gas, water etc.
- Tax increase - assessable income
- School fees/kindergartens/helpers
- Medical Insurance
- Work/living conditions
- Family/children's extra-curricular activities
- Increase in Helpers' salaries
- NET Exit Poll

Background

The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) lowered the NET Scheme Special Allowance from \$13,000 to \$ 10,500 for the 2004-2005 School Year.

The Legislative Council's (Legco's) Panel on Education approved the adjustment. This was done when the Hong Kong economy was rallying after SARS. Rental costs began to rise. The income tax rate increased. Foreign currencies gained value and the US and HK dollars fell in value.

These factors have led to the resignation of many NETs, the non-renewal of contracts and the current problems recruiting NETs.

History of the Enhanced Native-speaking English Teacher's (NET) Scheme

The Legislative Council has been closely involved with the implementation of the NET scheme since the Council passed a motion moved by the Hon. Mrs. Selina Chow "supporting the implementation of the policy of mother-tongue teaching in Hong Kong and urging the government to strengthen the teaching of the English language in secondary schools so as to enhance the basic proficiency of local students in using English as the second language to complement their pursuit of further studies and future careers," as quoted from Page 117 of Hansard on the 7th of May 1997.

Once the Chief Executive's 1997 Policy Address on the 9th of October of that year committed Hong Kong to the implementation of a new NET scheme, "providing more than 700 additional native-speaking English teachers for secondary schools from 1998", the die was cast and a period of debate as to the appropriate level of remuneration ensued.

Originally, the Special Allowance was to have been set at a much higher level to offset the high costs of rental accommodation, international schooling for NETs' children, transportation and other expenses. Some members expressed contrary views, as reflected in the Hon. Mrs. Elsie TU's successful motion requesting that "the government take into consideration the views of Members on the NET scheme proposal" (Hansard, p.99) A figure in excess of \$22,000 per month was mooted by the Government with the support of many Councillors, but by the 21st of November 1997, the Finance Committee, had "accepted the financial implications of introducing a new NET scheme", including a Special Allowance fixed at the reduced amount of \$13,000 per month.

Once they arrived in August 1998, most NETs found that the bulk of their Special Allowance was swallowed up in rental accommodation costs: the average monthly rent on an 800 square foot apartment in South Horizons, Ap Lei Chau by Aberdeen on Hong Kong Island being \$15,000 at that stage. However, there were geographical variations. A "village" style large two-storey townhouse in a New Territories area such as Pat Heung could be rented for as little as \$5,000 a month, allowing some NETs to make savings from their Special Allowances.

However, such lucky NETs tended to be in the minority. Most NETs found that health, family education costs, transportation and the suchlike were extra costs paid for from their salaries. The Special Allowance became a de facto accommodation subsidy.

Between 1999 and 2003, there was a period of stability in terms of both rental costs and the level of the Special Allowance. The SARS Epidemic and the resulting crisis in Hong Kong between March and June 2003 brought many risks, and also a few opportunities. The Rental Index did fall; the average monthly rent on an 800 square foot apartment in South Horizons dropping to \$12,000 by August 2003. However, this tended to be a short-term market adjustment. By the time of Mr. Wardlaw's letter of November 2003, announcing the cut in the Special Allowance from \$13,000 to \$10,561, rentals were already readjusting upwards.

Therefore, this was not a propitious time to introduce the EMB's mechanism for the annual adjustment of the Special Allowance for NETs. Panel on Education Member, Cheung Man-kwong had expressed conditional support for the above mechanism, provided that "the current turnover rate of NETs remained stable, the recruitment of NETs was reasonably secure, and that the EMB would consult NETs and their staff associations on the proposed mechanisms".

Disappointingly, none of Mr. Cheung's pre-conditions were ever met, and to a large degree, the EMB have not accurately represented the true situation of high turnover rates, low numbers of new NET recruits, and a lack of EMB consultation with NETs, to the Panel on Education nor to the Legco as a whole.

This committee is unaware of any consultation which might have transpired between the EMB and NETs prior to the decrease of the special allowance. In November 2003, Mr. Chris Wardlaw sent a letter to principals of NETs in the NET Schemes advising of the cut which was to take effect in the 2004/05 contract. Principals were asked to inform the NET of the content of the letter, which was sent one month

prior to the Legislative Council Panel on Education's approval of the reduced allowance and the new adjustment mechanism. Attached as Annex "A", please see Mr. Chris Wardlaw's letter of November 11th, 2003.

Since the introduction of the Special Allowance cut to \$10,500 from September 2004, the Rental Index has risen further, but the Special Allowance was adjusted downwards to \$10,000. In the meantime, the average monthly rent on an 800 square foot apartment in South Horizons rose to \$15,000 by May 2005 - the same level as in 1998.

Rental costs may have come full circle, but the Special Allowance's purchasing power has been greatly diminished. That is the sad position we find ourselves in today.

Tenant Rental Costs and CPI

Centaline Real Estate Company reports that from 2004 - 2005 rents (for tenants) rose 10 - 18% and a continued rise is foreseen from 6- 8% in 2005.

Reports have been noted in the South China Morning Post (February 17, 2005) and the local real estate firms that flat rentals have increased.

The Rating and Valuation Department has shown increases in rent for residential properties since last October. In 2004, there was a general increase of 11.2%.

The NESTA NET Rental Survey, attached as Annex "B", 45% of NETs surveyed report rent increases causing many of them to move. Leases which are not due until the Fall or Winter have NETs waiting in dread of the probable increases.

Although shifting from one location (residence) to another may be possible, the move incurs added expenses:

- shifting company expenses (packers, van, movers)
- telephone, television/cable, computer line reinstallation charges
- real estate company's commission
- 3 months' rent payable the first month (first month and last two months' rent)
- extra time and attention needed to: register with the gas and electric companies and pay the new deposit (charges); register a change of address with the post office, all correspondents and companies re billing

A Government Secretariat spokesman noted that overall consumer prices remained modestly higher in September 2004 than a year earlier. (Consumer Price Indices, September 2004)

In 2005, the Consumer Price Indices report increases in electricity, gas, water, food, clothing and footwear and transport

Tax Increase

To date, discussions have focused on the adequacy (or otherwise) of the gross amount of the Special Allowance that Nets receive. However, as we are all aware, the Special Allowance constitutes assessable income under the Hong Kong tax legislation and, therefore, must be declared on a tax return. As this

income is taxed at the top marginal rate, i.e. currently 20%, the after-tax benefit of the Special Allowance is reduced accordingly. (reference: H.K. Inland Revenue Department leaflet, Appendix to B.I.R. 60)

Example:	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Special Allowance	\$13,000	\$13,000	\$10,500
Marginal Tax Rate	18.5%	20%	20%
Tax Component	\$ 2,405	\$ 2,600	\$ 2,100
After-tax Benefit	\$10,595	\$10,400	\$ 8,400

In reality, the allowance has been reduced from \$10,595 a month, as recently as March 2004, to only \$8,400. The above figures clearly highlight the fact that the allowance that remains after payment of tax is not sufficient to cover monthly rents for the vast majority of Nets; nor will it also cover other necessary expenses that the Special Allowance is supposedly designed to offset.

The standard rate of tax in the year 2000 was 15% whereas it is 16% in 2005.

School Fees

For NETs with families, school fees represent a hefty portion of their monthly payments. It is mostly impossible to admit NETs' children into local Hong Kong schools because of the Chinese language requirement. That means NETs have to send their children to fee-paying international institutions.

The English Schools Foundation (ESF) schools are a good option in that they do not charge full fees since they currently still receive a Government subsidy in the form of "the subvention". NETs, along with other parents, worry that the Government will remove this subvention. The subsidy notwithstanding, the fees are substantial; the ESF schools charge an average of \$5,000 a month for kindergarten and primary school students and \$10,000 a month for secondary school students. The costs have proven to be prohibitive for NETs with more than one child at secondary school.

For example, one NET who has posted emails on NET websites has been working as a NET for nearly 7 years and raised two teenagers as a single parent. The base school fees at the ESF secondary school were \$16,000 "with many other additional expenses". As a result of the Special Allowance cuts from September 2004, the youngest child had to be sent back to their country of origin. The older child is in the middle of GCSE courses and does not want to leave Hong Kong until finishing A levels in June 2008. This NET feels that this difficult decision to split up the family could be reversed if the Special Allowance were to be restored to decent levels of remuneration. Then it would be possible to reunite the family and they could continue to live and work in Hong Kong better able to meet their prohibitive education costs.

Even more prohibitive are the unsubsidised private international schools that NETs who do not live in ESF school zones have often had to send their children to. The Yew Chung chain of English Kindergartens and Primary Schools charge \$9,890 - a student per month, for example. Such fees discourage NETs with children from living in Hong Kong. Unless they are adequately compensated via the Special Allowance, this will continue to be the case.

Health Issues for NETs

When teachers from other countries consider working overseas, one of their major concerns is health and safety issues. When teachers consider life in Hong Kong, the following health and environmental hygiene issues come into question:

- Air Pollution
- Non potable tap water
- Contaminated fish from fish markets
- Contaminated water in fish restaurant aquariums
- Bird Flu threat in Asia (see notes below)
- Possible SARS reemergence (see notes below)
- Medical Insurance Rates (see notes below)

Bird Flu

- TORONTO (CP) - The World Health Organization urged countries to make full haste with pandemic influenza preparations Wednesday as it released a report outlining disturbing changes to the H5N1 virus circulating in Asia.

The report raises concerns that molecular and disease pattern evidence may indicate the virus is becoming more adept at infecting people. It also reveals some strains of the H5N1 virus may be developing resistance to oseltamivir, the drug wealthy nations are flocking to stockpile as fears of a pandemic mount.

An influenza expert who helped draft the report said it's meant to convey the message that the level of anxiety regarding the virus has risen.

"I think it's fair to say that the report signifies a definite step up in concern," said Dr. Keiji Fukuda, a flu specialist from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control who is being seconded to WHO's global influenza program.

Fukuda was part of a recent three-person WHO mission to Vietnam, where the alarming changes are being observed in the northern part of the country. His team reported last week to a meeting of international experts in Manila; the report was drawn up from their deliberations. (excerpt: The Canadian Press, May 22/05)

- Experts say avian influenza, the health world's unwanted carpet-bagger for 2004, has entrenched itself in much of Asia and is unlikely to disappear anytime soon. "I think bird flu is going to continue to be a concern, and by all approaches it looks like it has become endemic in eight or nine countries in the region and the chances it will be eradicated are slim,"

Scott Dowell of the US Centres for Disease Control told AFP. (excerpt: AFP, Dec 14/05)

SARS

A Chinese scientist engaged in SARS research warned that it's too early to say severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus "could be considered eradicated outside laboratories."

Zhong Nanshan, director of the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Diseases who helped control the disease spread in China in 2003, said that studies in China have not ruled out the possibility of reemergence of SARS.

In the meantime, research in China shows that the civet cat is very likely to be a host of SARS virus and accountable for outbreaks in south China's Guangdong Province, said Zhong. (excerpt: Online People's Daily, February 24/05)

Medical Insurance Rates

Medical allowance is provided as reimbursement for the NET to take out medical insurance up to HK\$1400 per year for a single person and HK \$5400 per year for a married person accompanied by a spouse and/or children.

Examples of the cost of basic medical insurance for hospital coverage not including outpatient service coverage or clinic visits are:

- \$3500 for single person (30 years of age) 2004
- \$5900 for single person (50 years of age) 2004
- \$22000 for a family of 3 (previously \$12000 prior to an increase in 2004)

The above coverage is only applicable should the NET need to be admitted to hospital and stay overnight. Regular check-ups, consultations with a doctor due to illness and medication costs are not covered. Also, specialist consultation rates have increased even at public hospitals. One NET reports that medication required by a family member costs \$6000 here in Hong Kong, but is free in Australia.

Dental coverage is not included in the above medical policy costs.

Working/Living Conditions

Attached as Annex "C", please find anecdotal notes from NETS concerning the challenges in their daily lives due to costs and frustrations caused by their working conditions. Many are no longer able to cope on the salary package and will have to return to their home countries.

Other examples include holiday entitlement. Although the NET Scheme FAQ sheet states under School Holidays that "there are a total of 90 days per year", schools do not follow a standard holiday schedule. NETs often find that their summer holidays are limited to 2 or 3 weeks which is insufficient when considering the need to spend time with loved ones, the necessary respite in home countries and the time required to manage personal affairs. Also, mandatory professional development days are placed during Christmas and Easter holidays shortening travel time to home countries. This unpredictable and fickle scheduling of holidays by some school principals is another reason why teachers have opted to resign from or refuse a teaching contract in Hong Kong. The "cost" of not spending the summer with family is too high.

Please refer to Case Studies, Annex "C".

Family Extra-curricular Activities' Costs

If NETs have children; apart from the base school fees, as detailed in the School Fees section, there are many compulsory extra-curricular activities that NET parents have to finance. At most ESF primary schools, the bus fees average \$500 a month. Compulsory swimming lessons add up to about \$300 a month in the summer while art materials, school camps, computer textbooks, Library sponsorship and class trips comprise other obligatory expenses totalling at least another \$500 a month.

Growing children also have sporting, recreational and entertainment needs which incur significant voluntary extra-curricular costs. One NET has estimated that it costs circa \$800 a month for children's sports and other leisure activities, including swimming lessons, adding in a postscript that the expenses would be less in their home country because the children could be sent outside to run around the garden. The upshot is that this NET will have to leave Hong Kong in 2006, as they would not be able to afford to stay after this contract when their first child enters secondary school and their second child, primary school. School fees would then total approximately \$13,000 a month with school buses comprising an extra \$1,000 a month.

Increases in Salaries for Helpers

For many NETs with families, employing a helper is a necessity. Base salary costs for the helpers at minimum incur \$3,270 a month with many NETs paying extra. An added \$400 a month has to be paid as a tax to the Immigration Department in either quarterly, half-yearly or annual instalments.

The medical and accident insurance coverage also has to be factored in while the helpers' airfares and long service pay need to be considered.

Now helpers' salaries are set to rise by \$50-a month. NETs do not begrudge their helpers this deserved extra salary, but it is ironic coming at a time when NETs' own Special Allowances have been slashed. It is an extra expense to add onto the Cost of Living Index.

NET Exit Poll

In May 2004 there were 841 NETs (P&S) in Hong Kong. By September, the start of the new school year and after recruitment overseas, there was a loss of 129 teachers. By October a further 41 PNETs had resigned and by January 2005 a further 9 NETs had resigned.

In less than a year, and during the first year of the reduction of the Special Allowance, just under 200 NETs left Hong Kong.

Date	May 2004	Total Nets in HK	841
	September 2004		712
	October 2004		671
	January 2005		662

There was a hasty mid year recruitment by both the EMB and schools which brought in 41 new NETs in February 2005.

Since then, an estimate in May shows that 60 NETs have indicated they will not renew. This figure is expected to rise to 100 by June 2005. We have no idea how many new NETs have been offered jobs from the latest round of recruitment, but clearly it is getting increasingly difficult to find people.

(The above figures were provided by Damien Vance, Nesta Executive)

The following figures were provided by Stephen Lai, EMB:

Resignations/non-renewals:

SNETs 2003-04 51% PNETs 2004 -05 47%
SNETs 2004-05 48%

These figures are very much at odds with the numbers quoted to Legco stating that 3 out of 4 SNETs continue on to a second contract. Instead of 25% of Nets resigning per year, the figure has doubled to over 50%.

Summary

This document's main concern is the salary package NETs make. What they make happen in the classroom, though is beyond money value. They make kids wonder. They make them question. They make them criticize. They make them apologize and mean it. They make them write. They make them perfect their final drafts in English. They make them read, read, read. They make a difference!

NETs play an important role in the Hong Kong School English Curriculum and bring quality instruction to their students. We feel that the \$15,000 figure for the NET Special Allowance, an increase to the gratuity, the retroactive allowance package for the 2004/05 period, as well as the long-service payment is more than justified by the contents of this document. Living costs for NETs have risen approximately 20% from the original \$13,000 Special Allowance. The adjustments we request would promote the retention of NETS and recruitment of new teachers.

We ask the Legislative Council Panel on Education to consider the above-mentioned adjustments.

Submitted by,

 for Special Allowance & Gratuity Committee

Andrea MacKenzie
Perry Bayer
Kathy Hill
Mary Salter

ANNEX "A"

11-NOV-2003 18:10 FROM P&S SECTION, EMB

P.01

中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育統籌局
Education and Manpower Bureau
Government Secretariat, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

本局檔號 Our Ref.: EMB(CD)SD/ENET/1

電話 Telephone :2892 6188

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Education and Manpower Bureau
16/F Wu Chung House
213 Queen's Road East
Wan Chai,
Hong Kong

11 November 2003

Supervisor/Principal
All secondary and primary schools
provided with a NET under the NET schemes

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Introduction of an Adjustment Mechanism for the Special Allowance
under the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme**

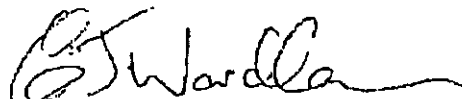
I write to inform you that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) plans to introduce a mechanism to automatically adjust the rate of Special Allowance now payable to the NETs recruited under the NET schemes of primary and secondary schools.

The Special Allowance is meant mainly to subsidize NETs on housing expense when they come to serve in schools in Hong Kong. The existing rate of the allowance at HK\$13,000 per month, was set in 1997 and has not been adjusted since then. On the other hand, the cost for meeting accommodation needs in Hong Kong has changed significantly over the years and it may move up or down in the years to come. We believe that a fairer and more flexible mechanism that can allow us to reflect such change, and any change that may take place in future, should be put in place. For that matter, we plan to introduce a mechanism that makes reference to the percentage change of the local rental index for adjusting the Special Allowance.

Our intended mechanism, if approved in due course, will take effect from the 2004/05 school year. The new Special Allowance rate, estimated to be about HK\$ 10,561 per month on the basis of the change of the local rental index since the present rate was set, and the adjustment mechanism, shall be applicable to serving NETs in those cases where their contracts are renewed, and to any newly recruited NETs, starting from the 2004/05 school year. Contracts now already in force will not be affected. We shall promulgate details when ready.

May I draw your attention to the above, and also solicit your help to present the content of this letter to the NET in your school to keep him or her informed of the development. If you or your NET have any enquiries, please contact Mr. P S LAJ on 2126 5292.

Yours faithfully,



(Chris WARDLAW)

for Secretary for Education and Manpower

TOTAL P.01

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ANNEX B

Results of Rental Survey Conducted by NESTA 16 April - 7 May, 2005.

In light of the current discussion about the Special Allowance for primary and secondary Native English-speaking Teachers (NETs), the Native English Speaking Teachers' Association (NESTA) conducted a simple survey between 16th April and 7th May, 2005. All NETs who attended the NESTA Professional Development Day on April 16th and all NETS with known email addresses were contacted.

Based on the 2003 statistic of 785 NETs in Hong Kong, the sample size of 148 respondents gives a confidence level of 95% plus or minus 7.25%. This is a satisfactory level of reliability. (Please note that at the time of the survey, only 708 NETs were in Hong Kong).

As this was a brief survey, respondents were asked four questions only:

- A) Which district do you live in?
- B) How much rent do you pay?
- C) Have you had a rental increase in the last two years? If so, how much was the increase?
- D) Have you moved in the last two years?

Rental Increases:

45% of NETs responding reported that they had suffered rental increases over the last two years. These range from \$1,000 to \$5,000, the latter in Central, Mid-Levels and Hong Kong Island.

28% reported rental increases of between \$1,000 and \$2,000, while a further 17% reported rises of between \$2,000 to \$4,000. In Tseung Kwan O, a NET reported an increase of \$3,500.

Many other NETs indicated that they expect their rents to rise. Some have been warned that their rents "will rise in the next five months". One NET stated, "The total increase in the past six and a half months has been 39%. My landlord predicts further rises later this year and probably next year, too."

45% of NETs experiencing actual increases in rental is a very significant figure.

No Rental Increases:

For the purposes of this survey, increases of less than \$500 were treated as a zero increase. While this group formed the majority of responses for the reporting period, many of the NETs had taken steps to ensure that their rentals did not increase. Strategies included: moving, signing two-year leases, and serving a Transitional Termination Notice (TTN, Housing and Rates Department Ordinance 2004) to enable them to stay in the same flat at the same rental for a further year.

38% of NETs responding have moved within the last two years and there are others who are facing moving within the next few months because of rising rentals. A typical comment from a Net who moved to save money was, "Our current rent is \$10,000 but our previous rent was \$13,500. We were forced to move out to Tung Chung due to the loss of Housing Allowance and rents going up in Tsing Yi." The NET facing the \$3,500 increase in Tseung Kwan O said "I definitely have to move."

Some NETS have asked for, and received, reductions in rentals from landlords. The drawback is that the rental reduction is less than the Special Allowance cut so the NETs are still suffering.

Several people who reported no increase also commented that they have only been in Hong Kong for a year or less, so had no information about the trend of rentals.

One NET on HK Island reported that her lease is due in March 2006 and the local real estate agent, who knows the building, told her to expect an increase of almost \$10,000 – from \$15,500 to \$25,000. Therefore, she expects to have to move and will have high shifting expenses to meet.

Location and rentals:

Those NETs paying higher rentals tend to live in areas such as Hung Hom, Central, Discovery Bay, Tai Koo and Mid-Levels, while the majority of people paying lower rents live in far-flung places such as Tai Po, Tin Shui Wai, Sai Kung, Cheung Chau or Ma On Shan. For some this will be a life-style choice, but for others proximity to schools is an important factor. Some PNETS are forced to live in more expensive areas like Central to be halfway between their schools. One such PNET is paying less than \$8,000 in Central.

One issue that was commented on by NETs, but not formally addressed by the survey is the situation of NETs with children. They face much greater costs than those who are single or who have come here without their families. In addition to needing a large apartment, they also have to pay for a helper plus school and/or kindergarten fees - all of which are rising. The Special Allowance was designed to help people meet their extra expenses and remains a taxable item as it has not been declared a Housing Allowance. When all expenses are taken into account, the current Special Allowance does not address NETs' needs.

A typical example of expenses for a NET with children is:

Costs faced in September 2005:
 School fees 13,000
 Rent 13,500
 Helper 4,000
 Basic costs 30,500

This NET's comment was, "I can't afford to remain a NET after 6 years' service, with a diverse education background, three degrees and a school that wants to keep me."

The Rental Survey, though carried out quickly and simply, has demonstrated clearly that rising rentals have already created concerns for NETs. There is a genuine concern that rentals will continue to rise and that the Special Allowance will no longer cover housing costs, let alone the other expenses that expatriates necessarily incur.

Kathy Hill

for the Rental Survey Team:
 Richard Barry, Kathy Hill, Lee Holloway.

ANNEX C

Case Studies of NET's experiencing financial difficulties.

Case 1.

This NET has been in Hong Kong since 1998, working successfully at the one school all that time. She is not renewing.

INCOME

June 2004 \$58,375
 September 2004 \$55,875
 January 2005 \$54,400

Outgoings in RED would not be incurred if I was living and working in Australia

MONTHLY COSTS

Rent	\$11,500
Helper	\$4,000
Primary school fee	\$4,700 (have not been informed whether this will remain the same in next school year)
Kindergarten fee	\$2750 (will increase for the next school year – amount not finalized)
School bus	\$450
Tax	\$10,000 (approx)
Gas	\$800 (approx)
Power	\$800 (approx)
Phones	\$600 (approx) (would be far less if I didn't need to keep in contact with family)
Children's sports and other activities (swimming lessons etc)	\$800 (approx) (if I was in Australia I would send them out to run around the garden!)
Food	\$3000 (approx)
Mortgage (Australia)	\$8000 (NB local teachers get a tax break on mortgage interest for local mortgages. We don't and interest is much higher than in HK)
Gym	\$733
Transport to and from work	\$800 (approx)
SUB-TOTAL 1 (costs incurred because we are living in HK)	\$24,200
SUB-TOTAL 2	\$24,733
TOTAL	\$48,933
REMAINDER	\$5467
MISCELLANEOUS	SCHOOL BOOKS, SCHOOL UNIFORMS, CLOTHING, SHOES, SCHOOL CAMPS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES, DENTAL AND ORTHODONTICS (EG BRACES FOR OLDER SON), LUNCHES AT SCHOOL (\$500/MONTH), BROADBAND INTERNET
SAVINGS	0

ANNEX C

OTHER EXPENSES

- Airfares - one return trip to Australia every 2 years - \$25,000+
- Holidays - none. Cannot afford them.
- Trips to Australia outside summer holidays - 2 in 7 years because unaffordable. Once after the death of my sister, once for a family reunion at Xmas 2003.
- This year, I have missed 2 weddings of daughters of my dead sister because cannot afford to travel.
- This January I incurred the cost of moving flats because the place where I lived was sold. Now paying \$1500/month more for equivalent flat. Cost of new furniture and removalist put me further in a hole
- Helper's airfares and long service pay need to be considered.
- \$30,000 to have baby in private hospital. Unable to attend ante-natal clinics in public hospital because they are only in work hours (in Australia they have them in the evenings too!), so I ended up sticking with my obstetrician because I needed a caesarean for medical reasons.

OTHER POINTS

- Cannot afford to stay after this contract as 2nd son would enter primary school, 1st son secondary school. School fees would then total approx \$13,000 and buses another thousand.
- Since I arrived in HK, my pay has not increased because I started on top of scale. However, as my first son was only 20 months old when I arrived and my second son was not born, my expenses have increased exponentially. I was not aware when coming here just what a financial burden schooling would be. I had assumed that in a place where many schools are EMI my son would be able to attend a local school at no cost (members of my staff with Australian passports regularly return to Australia and use Australian schools as free summer schools for their children during the summer vacation). No consideration has been given to this issue in deciding the special allowance.
- Talk of an increased gratuity is a slap in the face to long-serving NETs like me who have been here since 1998 and are being forced out by the financial squeeze. Why not introduce long service pay? It is given to domestic helpers after 5 years' service - why not to us?
- My monthly outgoings are actually more than stated as I have sunk into the debt pit because of the house move, tax loans and the dramatic drop in the value of HK dollar. In an attempt to make ends meet I have been working a 2nd job teaching Benchmarking courses at a major HK university for the past 3 years. I am happy to contribute to HK education in this way, but wish I didn't always feel it was all about the money.

ANNEX C

Case 2

This coming school year I will need to enrol my son in Kindy - Sunshine is about \$3 300 a month and the following year is over \$4 000. This is what the 'special' allowance helps to cover. My rent is \$9 000. (Of course not much later and my second son will start Kindy also). Kids in HK are expensive esp with doctors. Spouse tax deduction has decreased and spouses are now not permitted to work.

Kids at home all day also means air-conditioning is on all day so power bills are high. - last summer we got to around \$1700 (2 months) and that was with trying not to use it too much. Of course the special allowance, as you are aware, is taxed!

As everyone has done, we have deducted the special allowance and added on an increased gratuity and found that we would be worse off overall!! (My basic is \$37 000).

The big negative is that this is all being discussed now - not much time to find another job or make plans etc - sure that you will point this out to Legco.

I keep my principal informed as she is desperate not to lose me. She said reasons for cut and increased gratuity - gratuity is regarded as non-recurrent cost, while salary is regarded as recurrent cost. Every govt department has been trying their best to cut recurrent cost, but not for non-recurrent. I could never understand their logic, quite fuzzy! If we paid one thousand for someone who could do nothing, and we get rid of someone at 5 thousand but they could do everything, we are saving money? silly.

Case 3

During my four years of service as a NET, my daughter completed high school, first at an ESF school and then, because I couldn't afford the fees, as a correspondence student. Now she is in her second year at university in New Zealand and I bear the cost of maintaining two households as well as the fees. Although she works part time to help with the costs, it has been necessary to take out a student loan to assist. With the cuts in wages and housing allowance, it's too expensive for me to stay in Hong Kong. Although I've been asked to stay, unless it is financially viable, I'll have to go.

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Case 4

This is perhaps the first time NESTA has given serious thought to NETs with children. I have two secondary school going children and they had already had a few years in school in Melbourne before I brought them here. ESF charges 7,800 per month per student and because I live in Gold Coast the transport charges are 1200 per month. That is $15,600 + 2400 = 18000$ on education only. Now the Estate owners have increased the rent of the flat I live in. When I renew in Sept '05, I will be paying 2500 more than what I am paying now. Current rent $9500 + 2500 = 13000$. Mind you, this is a 890 sq ft apartment with three bedrooms. If you look at the prices of commodities and compare with year 2000 at any supermarket Parkn shop or Welcome, they are higher by at least 15%. My wife doesn't work and takes care of the children. I have never even considered the luxury of a helper because of the additional expenses.

Case 5

I am a Pnet who started here last September on \$10,500 Special Allowance. I found a nice flat for \$10,000 in a convenient location. My landlord has just informed me that he has to sell the flat because he is being re-located to China. In my complex I cannot find another flat for less than **\$13,000**. I will also have to suffer the inconvenience and cost of moving house. This is an increase of \$3,000 in just nine months which is staggering.

I actually think it is worth considering the difficulty for NETS to move when we are dealing in a second language. Getting people to understand us over the phone is often tricky, frustrating and lengthy, often information passed is unclear. I have to find out "how" one moves in HK. Contact PPCW, Hutvkinson, Towngas, Now, etc etc Find removalists, negotiate cost. Hopefully all my recently purchased furniture will fit into the new place. At home, I know what and how to move, who to contact and I have a network of family and friends to help. It's just not as easy here.

Special Allowance needs to consider these needs. I would stay in the same building if I could afford it. Sadly I can't. I have my own mortgage at home and my own superannuation scheme. bills etc etc. Yes, I am still in front but less so now and I have only been here 9 months.

Use this if it is useful. don't worry if it is not. Emotional needs are different here, perhaps it is worth considering.

Case 6

This Net negotiated a rental in the Mid-Levels in June/July 2003, just after Sars, at \$13500 per month. His renewal is due at the same time (June /July) 2005. He was

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forewarned by his landlord to expect "a sizeable increase". He was finally told that the new figure would be \$22000 per month. He said this was impossible and did not want to go through the stress of moving as he has just had a new baby. The landlord has told him he would get back to him soon. Since then he has found out that there is a mechanism in place to enable him to stay on for one further year at the original rental. However, he feels that the last thing he needs right now, as he is preparing for his family to go back for the summer, is further problems with his landlord. His mother-in-law has recently been very ill and the family has had to pay for fares back to Australia to ensure her well-being. All of these are real costs, which are beginning to make even being in Hong Kong questionable. The size of the proposed increase illustrates the difficulties that many Nets who live on HK Island may well have, as their rentals come up for renewal either this year or next.

Contractual difficulties**Case 1**

21 May 2005

1/ I Applied for sick leave, called principal. Saw my pay at the end of the month was 1 day short. Principal had 'denied' my sick leave, did not tell me, had no discussion with me, just arbitrarily 'docked' my salary! Unbelievable! As a result, checked my bank balance. Seems there are 3 separate occasions where this has occurred! After 'discussion', it seems the only option is for me to obtain the services of a 'lawyer'. Why should I have to do that?? What right does he have to do this?? This is not right.

2/ Was told I had to come into school and supervise HKCEE exams. Heard that other staff and students did not have to come to school on that, a normal working Monday. Was told this was to 'work' off my 'accumulated' leave! (I have '9 lessons' accrued so far this YEAR!) Wouldn't you agree that this is an infringement of employee rights, bullying tactics and intimidation over our rights, as employees, to leave? I didn't take the day off 'leave' but was sorely tempted!

3/ I signed my current NET contract in February 2004, when the special allowance cut was not confirmed. I was 'forced' (no job offer otherwise) to 'agree' that I would 'agree' to the 'cut' when it was implemented more than 6 months later. Shouldn't the initial special allowance be paid for the length of my contract as those were the current conditions? My Principal is being intransigent over it - again the only progress will be made with a lawyer - should I have to do that?

4/ Re: Saturday morning work. What are our rights? I have been 'bullied' into a Saturday work schedule of 1 off one on all year! Horrible for social life, professional development (most on Saturdays) etc, and with the attendance rate of the students I am supposed to teach below 10%, a total nightmare! I have complained that it is a waste of time etc. with no students present. In response I have had my teaching 'philosophy' attacked (by the Principal) as incompetent as 'my teaching' must be the reason students fail to show!! (can't be that I am the only teacher who does

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not punish the tripe out of them, and threaten and intimidate them to come to my 'fun English games/drama/DVD/music/mime/etc classes!)

Case 2

22 May 2005.

The NET and her husband came March 2004. Her contract is March 04 to August 05. Her husband's is from April 04 to August 06. She and her husband are a year out of sync. She would like a one year extension of contract so that she and her husband are on the same time frame.

The school will not offer her a one year extension. They want her to do two years but that would put her and her husband on different time frames.

Medical Difficulties

My wife came to HK with a medical condition requiring medication. What was available for no charge in Aus here cost \$6000 every month or so. It was prohibitive. At great inconvenience we arranged a shipment from home. The problem was not helped by the irrational ban on the spouses of NETs seeking employment.. Why was this introduced ? It worsens the situation here for couples - don't work and be together or stay apart and keep working. It sucks - as my kids would say.

Holiday TroublesCase 1

Subject: 12 days work in summer holidays

20 May 2005

Just wanted to let you know that my principal at ***** college informed me that I have to be back at work on the 2nd August to teach oral and do summer duties. I was shocked to hear and told him I will talk to ENB and find out what I can do about it. I rang Stephen Lai and he said it was up to the principal. I can negotiate and work 6 days during Christmas and 6 days on Easter.

I will try and do that. This is my third contract in the same school. Everything was hunky dori until last year when the pressure started

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building. He wants to make our school an EMI and so the pressure is on all the teachers. To be fair I am included. So much for the school based management. What can I say? I was enjoying teaching for the first four years.

Case 2

21 May 2005

I have been a NET since Jan 1999.

I can't really say that I have been "badly treated" although I feel by any NET's standards I have been harshly dealt with. I have been at the same school, out in the wilds of the New Territories near *****, since I arrived. It's a band 5 (well new band 3, I guess) school & we got a new Principal last Sept. It is amazing how quickly the whole school culture, ethos & atmosphere can be so altered by someone new at the helm.

This school year, we have not had summer timetable (up until last year we had no air conditioners in any of the class rooms), we have not been able to leave at 1:30 during exam times (so the teachers just have an extra long lunch & sit around & gossip until it is time to go), we have to stay until 4:30, and we must do after school tutorials. Now none of this is really, really too horrendous. I can do it. It irks me to sit around until 4:30 on the days I don't have after school tutorials, but really every one is in the same boat. Doesn't matter if I rehearse kids in my own home for the Solo Verse Competition for hours on end for weeks on end, or that when I am involved in the drama comp I usually can't get away until 6 pm or even later. Still we can't go until 4:30. Ok, so be it.

BUT.....now we are coming to territory that is sacrosanct for any NET. I am mid contract this summer and my Principal has made it very plain that I shall be treated like all other staff and will only get to have 2 weeks summer vacation. TWO WEEKS??

All the other things were only do-able as I kept thinking, oh well I have a big summer break coming up. But now I don't. I rang the EMB & Stephen Lai said that I'd have to negotiate with my Principal and offer to work another "major" hol, like Chinese New Year. I haven't left HK since late last July. It is not the school's fault (maybe the EMB's though for changing the ground rules) that I must now have a TESOL qualification at least to Diploma level, so I have been doing that 2 nights a week since October last year and hence haven't been able to go away for Xmas, CNY or Easter. So you can imagine that I was champing at the bit to have a good long break for summer. Not to be. Oh, did I tell you we had to sign a piece of paper (that translated, as it was all, of course, in Chinese) which said that we would not "talk about the school outside"? So when Phoebe Mok (who I talked to before I got onto Stephen Lai), asked me which school I was at, I had to tell her, sorry I can't tell you, as I had to sign a piece of paper that said I wouldn't talk about the school "outside".

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So..... Basically my woes are: 2 weeks hol for summer and there's nothing I can do about it. I don't want to pull out of the school mid contract & forgo my gratuity next year, but I certainly feel like it. Yes, I could go one on one with the Principal or get someone "heavy" in to back me up, but then my life for the next year with the new Principal would be hell, so I don't want to do that.

You know, I think sometimes that my concerns about getting a long enough holiday are pretty petty. Picture this: Oh the school management board won't nominate any names to be terminated this coming summer as they want to know that all teachers approve of those that have to go!!!???? (We have to lose 10 teachers due to shrinkage in numbers). What did they do then? The Principal announced that there'd be a vote for 7 teachers to be the ones to determine the 10 to go.

Got goosebumps? Well I did. Never heard anything more cruel in my life. Last Fri. at an afterschool staff meeting the Principal gave out an award first up for the 7 that had to make such a hard decision. The 10 who got the flick were sitting there stony faced & green around the gills. No one clapped. On the Mon when the 10 were told, there were tears from all including the 7 who had to come up with the 10's names.

So.....in the scheme of things me only having 2 weeks for Summer hol seems pretty insignificant compared to colleagues I've known & who have been very good to me for over 6 years, having to face the sack (can you imagine the atmosphere in the staff room before the announcement? Not good, let me tell you). But well, no other NET will only have 2 weeks. No one else that I know of has had to sign a piece of paper that says they will not talk about the school "outside". Plus as I re-signed last year I have had the reduced housing allowance & that's no fun. I am really beginning to wonder if my time as a NET is coming to an end. But that'd be a shame, as being here has opened up my world by allowing me to travel to places I'd only ever dreamed about before. I don't feel as if my time in HK is finished yet, but I am almost being forced into, my days of a NET coming to an end.

Oh well, just keep a low profile I guess and change to a new school next year might be the answer. Who knows, but in the mean time I am very stressed about only getting 2 weeks hol for summer.

Case 3

I was told last week that my CNY was cancelled and I would be required to work. I am being given the 3 public holidays. I will be the only teacher working in the school. I have contacted EMB and waiting to hear more back. The principal told me she can make me work but at least she can't make me sign another contract and I won't.

Case 4

27 February 2005

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Net had to work during CNY. (She got the three statutory days off.)
Stephen Lai phoned her Principal on the Friday before CNY. This only made things worse and the woman said NET must work during the Easter holidays!
Following this the SET managed to get the Principal to change her mind and let her have the Easter holidays. In return ***** must now work Saturdays! She has agreed to this in order to keep the peace.
The Chinese AT is ineffectual and has offered no support.
The staff at the school are supportive. They are victimized too: will miss Easter hols!
The Principal has such power because the school is merging and many staff will be made redundant.
She does not intend to renew her contract. When is she allowed to leave HK at the end of the summer term?

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Unreasonable Situations at work**Case 1**

NET being given an entirely unreasonable work-load - three full classes plus five other lessons, 'extra' oral classes until 5pm daily (these 'extra' classes are not counted on the timetable but are expected to be taught) and mountainous corrections due to very demanding response level in Extended Reading Scheme.

b) When a NET in this situation suffered a physical and emotional collapse, the principal urged them to take 'stress' leave and then harassed them further, insisting that they must come in personally, not their spouse, to deliver a doctor's certificate; and that they must catch up on the corrections missed while they were away. (This insistence on the NET personally delivering a doctor's certificate has occurred in more than one school - seems to be a pattern.)

Case 2

NET having to solo teach extremely low level junior classes where students understand no English and have severe behavioural problems even for Chinese-speaking teachers. This happens far too often, and is a disgrace. It destroys the NET and does nothing positive for the students concerned.

One NET, among numerous in this situation, was also denied permission to use the text book that other classes were using on the grounds that s/he was 'the expert' and earned far more than anyone else in the school. This NET had to create an entire program him/herself, sourcing from the internet and elsewhere, and then had to write detailed lesson plans which were ripped to shreds at the end of each week by two colleagues who were self-contradictory and refused ever to say what it was they were expecting until after the event. These lesson plans had then to be re-written before the Monday classes began. I saw a lot of this material myself. The NET concerned was up late every night and never had any recreation time on weekends.

Case 3

NET being sexually harassed by the panel chair to the point where s/he had to go to the principal, who initially supported him/her. After this the PC criticized, belittled and overloaded the NET, making working in the school intolerable, and the principal supported the PC and instituted his/her own harassment campaign including admonishing the NET for taking (rare) sick leave, telling the NET s/he should recuperate from illness such as flu 'in your own time', even when the NET has a doctor's certificate and is clearly ill to any casual observer. This school has a history of very poor relations with NETs.

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Case 4

In my second year of my contract, I was doing the school based assessment for primary NETS.

What was supposed to be a collaborative project quickly turned into me doing all the work, even though I had informed teachers about the project at least 4 months ahead of time.

I was at the point of amassing all my students work and doing the empirical data for the project. I completed it and showed it to my supervisor and the headmistress. In it I said, I had done all the work on the evaluation and that I found little evidence that the school was doing any kind of formative assessment. This seemed to enrage my colleagues.

Next, my headmistress had wanted to see the students work. I was in a hurry to mark it and get it back to them. I had given some books to my headmistress-the students portfolios and students books they had made through process writing. I saw the principal and one of the head teachers was done looking at them so they sat in a pile on the conference room table after school. The door to the room was wide open. I thought it would be fine if I took the books back to my desk to mark so that the students could get their work before the term ended.

I got a really cold shoulder the next day-the head teacher said that the books were actually considered, "in the headmistresses office" and they were shocked that I had taken them. They asked me if I would steal things from the headmistresses office! I said it wasn't so bad and offered to apologize. I went to the headmistresses office and waited a half an hour. She wouldn't see me as she was too busy. So, I typed up a note and gave it to her secretary. Her secretary advised me after about 20 minutes she couldn't accept the note, that I had to talk to her in person. So I gave up. I went to the head teacher and said I was sorry. She said, "it's not me, it's the headmistress who is really upset." So, eventually I had a chance to talk to the headmistress and she said, "its not me, it's the head teacher who is really upset, you should apologize to her." I had enough of this and decided I didn't care and the only reason I stayed at the job was because I liked the kids and that because I thought the money was still good I could ignore these horrible people. Next, they went through my work with a fine toothed comb and complained that the marking hadn't all been finished. They had watched me work on the school based evaluation and putting the kids portfolios together (I eventually gave up because nobody was interested in the kids putting their own work together for formative assessment) and they thought I hadn't done ANY marking at any time throughout the year. They thought

I was doing all my marking at that point. It was simply untrue.

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Oh yeah, they also decided that, despite these kids having given their blood to create mini-books out of their process writing - at least 5-6 hours work and despite many of the students portfolios having a record of their whole year's work that they could have used to study exams - the headmistresses decided to keep all of these things and not give them back to the children.

I thought I could forget about it, and celebrated what I knew was an extremely hard working and productive year. Then came my evaluation. They had given me barely passing marks all across the board for my job performance and cited what the same misunderstood points as before. I asked everyone what I should do, and initially asked to protest and write a formal statement of disagreement with my evaluation. I had started doing this with the vice principal, but I experienced severe doubt with her English ability. I had met briefly with the headmistress and her, and it became totally obvious it wasn't an impartial process—they began to twist everything I said to put the blame on me and make me look bad. I asked an a trusted Chinese colleague what I should do—she told me I should just keep my mouth shut and ignore it. So I did, but I made a decision—everything the school wanted me to do would have to be written out and operationally defined or else I wouldn't do it. I had been totally derided and made to pay for trying to change things. So I decided I would do "work to rule" and absolutely nothing beyond it. Since then, it has become clear that that particular school is absolutely dominated by the headmistress/monarch and that it will never change until she is thrown from power. Other teaching colleagues have told me other horror stories about her as well.

I'll never forget what my headmistress said, "The first two years were very bad. Let's just forget everything and start again." I thought, the first thing I've learned from education is, "learn from your mistakes."

So I do it for the kids and the money, in that order. Since I have another school where my efforts and participation are much more valued, I keep going on this job.

If they did it to me again, I would definitely quit, but not before I had absolutely milked the system for all it was worth to get back at them. And believe me, they would never hear the end of it, even if I left Hong Kong.

How does Hong Kong stand up against other places as an employer

Country	Scheme	Housing	Allowance	Schooling	Teaching	Salary	Support Structure
Indonesia	Australian Volunteer Abroad Scheme	Rent free 5-bedroom house	5 kg rice, \$150 AUD per month		2-3 contact hours per day	(0)	
Papua New Guinea		Rent free 4-bedroom furnished house	15% gratuity	Free			Interest-free car loan
In Papua New Guinea the school and principal were very understanding when welfare issues arose, unlike HK where I was told after taking a week off for my dad's funeral that I should have just claimed sick leave if I needed a week off.							
Dubai		Free Luxury accommodation		School allowances	Good working conditions	Tax free salary	Yearly air fare
Brunei	Centre for British Teachers	Housing Officer Had a 5 bed-room house rent free	15% gratuity	Free	Had a say in location and type of school	Not great A well-designed package	Great! Interest-free car loan Welfare Officer - advised on schooling, health etc
The Brunei scheme has endured for 20+ years, despite the salaries because people are well-looked after. People stay there because they feel valued.							
Shanghai and Beijing are also proving attractive to NETs in the current environment.							

The Brunei package

- The two most important financial differences between the Brunei and the Hong Kong packages are that there is no income tax in Brunei, and that the Brunei package acknowledges that parents have more financial needs than single teachers.

Salary: These are per month figures in Brunei dollars. \$B1 = \$Singapore1 \$1 Singapore = \$4.6 HK

Degree + PGCE/DipED		Honours Degree + PGCE/DipED	
< 8 years	3050	< 8 years	3050
9-10+ years	3233	7-8+ years	3233
11-12+ Years	3425	9-10+ years	3631
13-14+ years	3631	11-12+ years	3631
15+ years	3848*	13-14+ years	3848
	4070	15+ years	4070*
	4100		4314
			4500

* = top entry point

Housing allowance: These are per month figures in Brunei dollars.

Single person: \$1300

Married teacher: \$1500

Teaching couple (ie where both partners are CIBT teachers): \$1700

This money is paid directly to the landlord. CIBT finds the furnished accommodation for the first twelve months. After the first year, you can choose to receive the housing allowance in cash and find your own accommodation, and therefore keep any difference in the rent.

Medical insurance:

Per annum: approx \$300 - paid by CIBT for the teacher. Spouses and dependent children aged 12-18 are subsidised 50%

Settling in allowance:

\$500

There is an extra \$500 per child, up to a maximum of two children, for teachers with dependent children

End of contract bonus:

One-sixth of total basic earnings (without allowances)

Re-signing bonus:

An unspecified amount payable for re-signing for at least twelve months. The amount depends on how many people re-sign each year.

Annual travel allowance:

Paid in October each year after completing an initial contract and extending. \$B3000 per teacher, accompanying spouse, dependent accompanying children 12-17, \$B2250 dependent accompanying children 2-11, \$B300 dependent accompanying children under two.

Baggage allowance:

Varies according to your country of origin, and whether you are single, married, a teaching couple or a teaching couple with children.

The leaving baggage allowance ranges from \$B875 for a single person, regardless of country of origin, to \$B1875 for a teaching couple with children.

Other allowances:

1. Monthly allowance of \$B350 for dependent spouses and \$B150 per child (maximum two) until child is five years old.
2. Ten days' paid compassionate leave.
3. Six weeks' paid maternity leave.
4. Twenty-eight days per annum paid sick leave.
5. The cost of an initial six week Malay language course

Education allowances:

CfBT pays an Education Allowance for up to two children in school in Brunei. The allowances are based on the fees at ISB (International School Brunei), and go up to \$B7500 (Secondary Year 12-13).

Interest free car loan:

CfBT provides an interest-free car loan of up to \$B10,000, repayable over ten to twenty months, depending on your pay, for the purchase of a car. It is impossible to function in Brunei without a car.

The non-financial part of the package:

1. The support of CfBT, who is the employer, not the Ministry of Education and not the schools. This includes a Project Officer who acts as guide, advisor, mentor; a Welfare Officer, who provides support if required when dealing with medical issues and who acts as a sounding board, if one needs to talk things through without going to the P.O.; Housing Officers, who help in all dealings with landlords about anything to do with housing, including problems re maintenances, bills etc; a one to two week Orientation Course on arrival with help in all aspects of establishing oneself in a new country, including opening bank accounts, getting work permits, visiting schools, learning about the education system; dealing with the Ministry of Education if there are major problems; the provision of a library or resources for the classroom and for professional development.
2. The teaching day, for morning staff, is approx 7.20am - 12.40pm, with two extra hours twice a week. Afternoon staff work slightly shorter hours. No holiday duties, although there may be the occasional 'flag-waving' duties on public holidays.
3. Class sizes vary, from about five to forty. The average depends on your school. In my school, most classes are less than thirty students.
4. Unless you are a primary teacher, you are not the only expatriate English teacher in the school.

- Cost of living (examples only):

1. Electricity - for a single person, with two air conditioners running most of the time when I am at home, is approx. \$B70 per month.
2. Water - for a single person, showering up to three times a day, is approx \$B2 per month. A family of four would pay about \$15.
3. Petrol - premium unleaded is \$B0.53 per litre. It usually costs me \$B17 to fill the tank of a Nissan Sunny sedan.
4. Food costs vary, depending on where you shop and what you buy, of course, but as a single person I rarely have a grocery bill of more than about eighty dollars a week.
5. A part time amah costs \$B7 per hour, a live-in amah \$B350 - \$B500 per month.

Comparing the two packages, Hong Kong obviously offers more in terms of money, but Brunei offers more in terms of support, both professionally and personally, and for parents.

29th May, 2005.

Overseas Experiences

I worked in two other third world countries, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. I can say that in both teaching assignments I was treated with more respect and professionalism by my employer/s and the employing authority.

In Malaysia the school and Principal were very understanding when welfare issues arose, unlike HK, where I was told after taking a week off to attend my dad's funeral that I should have just claimed sick leave if I needed a week off.

I have worked in Brunei and Malaysia, both with the Centre for British Teachers (now abbreviated to CfBT). The pay is not as good as here, BUT there is a huge support structure.

In Brunei I had a week-long Induction Course, which culminated in a placement and housing interview.

I had a say in the location and type of school I wanted to work in, after making some school visits and meeting people who were working there. I also had a say in the kind of accommodation I'd like, after some arranged visits to a range of house-types. There was a Housing Officer who assisted us in meeting the landlord and making arrangements to move in. Rent was paid by CfBT directly.

There was also a Welfare Officer, who advised on schooling for kids, health matters, visited us in hospital, counselled those in need, helped arranged bereavement trips home etc.

There were Professional Officers who could act as intermediaries with the admin. in schools, who observed us in class and arranged PD gatherings.

It was a well-designed "package", not just a salary scale.

The Brunei programme endures (20+ years?), despite the salaries, because people are well looked after. People stay there because they feel valued. They feel that they have a role to play.