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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 24 October 2005**

Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

Purpose

This paper summarises the discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on implementation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme in primary and secondary schools since the first term of the Legislative Council (LegCo). Members may wish to refer to paragraphs 8 – 15 below for recent discussions made at the meeting of the Panel on 11 July 2005.

Background

2. In 1997, the Finance Committee approved the provision of one Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) over and above the teacher establishment of each public sector secondary school from the 1998-99 school year. Under the Scheme, schools adopting Chinese as the Medium of Instruction are allowed to fill one of the additional English teacher posts with another NET. NETs are expected to enrich the language environment in schools, act as a resource person to bring in effective teaching methods from overseas, and assist in school-based teacher development.

3. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research commissioned the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) to conduct a study on the monitoring and evaluation of the NET Scheme in secondary schools from October 1998 to June 2001. Results of the study showed that all stakeholders, including NETs, local English teachers, school management, students and parents, found that NETs had achieved a positive impact in enriching the language environment in schools and bringing in a wider variety of teaching methods in the secondary schools under the study. The study confirmed the effectiveness of the NET Scheme in secondary schools and recommended its extension to primary schools starting from the 2002-03 school year.

4. The NET Scheme was introduced to public sector primary schools in the 2002-03 school year. Under the Primary NET Scheme, schools having six or more classes are eligible for the provision of NET and every pair of eligible primary schools is allocated one NET. An Advisory Teaching Team (ATT) comprising NETs and local English teachers has been established to provide centralised support to English teaching in primary schools provided with NETs, as well as to foster professional development of English teachers in primary schools with less than six classes.

5. In addition to the NET Scheme, English Language Teaching Assistants (ELTAs) have been provided to schools in a small scale by a non-profit making organisation since 1994, with financial support from the Language Fund, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the Quality Education Fund. These ELTAs are mostly English native-speaking high school or above students who take time off to travel overseas before further studies. ELTAs are initially provided mainly to secondary schools and, in recent years, increasingly to primary schools.

6. According to the Administration, the remuneration package for NETs comprises a basic salary equivalent to that of local graduate teachers and a number of other allowances, including a fixed special allowance for appointees whose normal place of residence is outside Hong Kong, a baggage allowance, a medical allowance and a contract gratuity of 15% of the total basic salary over the contract period.

7. In November 2003, the Administration had proposed to introduce a mechanism for making regular adjustment to the rate of the special allowance payable to NETs. Members in general expressed support for the proposal. They, however, expressed concern as to whether the proposal would have a negative effect on recruitment and retention of NETs in the long run. Members urged the Administration to consult NETs and the Native English-speaking Teachers' Association (NESTA), and also to review the impact of the adjustment mechanism on the recruitment and retention of NETs in the future. They had requested the Administration to consult the Panel if there were any changes in the turnover rate and recruitment of NETs, and problems in communication with NETs.

Recent development

8. The Administration updated the Panel on the latest position of the NET Scheme at its meeting on 11 July 2005. According to the survey of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) with schools and latest school requests, 49%, i.e. 75 and 46%, i.e. 67 of the serving NETs reaching the end of their contracts would not renew contracts in secondary and primary schools respectively at the turn of the 2005 school year. According to the Administration, the respective reference attrition rates in 2003-04 were 44% and 39%, meaning a modestly higher turnover rate in 2004-05. However, the secondary NET attrition rates in 2002-03 school year and 2001-02 school year were 48% and 40% respectively.

9. The Panel had also received the views from representatives of NESTA at the same meeting on 11 July 2005. Representatives of NESTA considered that the entire NET remuneration package was becoming less attractive in the light of various factors including salary adjustments in line with the civil services, rising living costs in Hong Kong, changing currency relativities and competitive offers for professional native-speaking English teachers in other places. In particular, they considered that the downward adjustment of the special allowance for NETs from \$13,000 to \$10,500 in mid-May 2005 was not in line with the rising rental costs in recent years.

10. Members in general found the projected turnover rate of NETs in primary and secondary schools unacceptable. In view of the resources required for the recruitment of NETs and the contribution of NETs to the upgrading of English proficiency of local students, they considered that EMB should examine the causes for the high turnover rate and take remedial measures to improve the situation. Some members, however, considered that EMB should also evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the Scheme in terms of its effect on upgrading English proficiency of local students.

11. The Administration explained to the Panel that apart from a competitive remuneration package, a sense of achievement and satisfaction in the workplace was equally important for the retention of experienced NETs. Through conducting the survey and exit interviews, EMB would develop a profile of the NETs who had decided to leave the service. Meanwhile, EMB would continue to collaborate with principals, NETs and local English teachers to enrich the job contents and enhance job satisfaction of NETs, as well as to resolve disputes between principals and NETs over teaching and non-teaching matters. In addition, EMB would continue to maintain regular contacts with NESTA on improving the remuneration package and support for NETs. The Administration also informed the Panel that the conduct of the three-year evaluation study on the effectiveness of the NET Scheme in primary schools was on target, the results of which would provide information on how the NET Scheme should be effectively used in the long term.

12. The Administration further pointed out that EMB had carefully examined the parameters for re-adjusting the special allowance for NETs, but considered that there was no reasonable justification for not following the approved adjustment mechanism at this stage. According to the survey among NETs, about 72% of serving NETs were residing in flats with monthly rentals below the current special allowance of \$10,500 per month. On the other hand, about 6% of respondents said that they were residing in a flat with a monthly rental of \$14,000 and above.

13. Some members were of the view that the Administration should review and improve the competitiveness of the remuneration package for NETs, including the special allowance adjustment mechanism, in the light of the rising living costs and the offers under similar schemes in other places. They suggested that the Administration should allow flexibility in the design of the remuneration package and arrangements for NETs, and consider the provision of higher gratuity rates to retain experienced NETs on the basis of their seniority in service.

14. Some other members, however, were of the view that given the high living costs in Hong Kong, it would not be realistic for NETs to expect a living environment which was about the same as that in their native countries. They considered that EMB should ensure that any flexibility in the remuneration package for NETs should not be in conflict with the relevant civil service policies and regulations for employment of expatriate staff.

15. At members' request, the Administration undertook to revert to the Panel on measures that might help retain experienced NETs to continue their service in local schools as well as plans to step up support for the NET Scheme.

Other previous discussions of the Panel

16. The implementation of the NET Scheme was also previously discussed by the Panel at its meetings on 16 November 1998, 19 November 2001, 21 January and 16 December 2002, 17 November 2003 and 10 January 2005. A gist of the discussions held at these meetings is given in the following paragraphs.

Implementation

17. Members in general supported the implementation of the NET Scheme in secondary and primary schools to enhance teaching and learning English in school education. Some members pointed out that learning a foreign language should start at an early age. They urged the Administration to provide each primary school with a NET as soon as practicable.

18. The Administration explained to the Panel that the NET Scheme in primary schools was aimed at providing an authentic environment for students to learn English and develop their confidence in using English for communication. It also sought to support local English teachers in their professional development. The initial objective of the Primary NET Scheme was to establish a foundation for expansion of the Scheme to cover all primary schools in the long term. Sufficient fund had been set aside for the provision of a NET in all primary schools.

19. As regards the timetable for provision of one NET to all primary schools, the Administration pointed out that it hinged on the supply and availability of qualified Primary NETs. Given the recruitment constraint as well as the need to guarantee the quality of NETs, the expansion of the Primary NET Scheme would have to be implemented on a gradual basis. Nevertheless, the Administration would speed up the recruitment process by stepping up recruitment efforts to take in NETs in the middle of a school year.

20. The Administration also informed the Panel that if NETs could not be provided on a sharing basis to all primary schools which had applied to join the Primary NET

Scheme, the Administration would offer each of these schools a cash grant of \$150,000 (i.e. the cost of an ELTA provided by the non-profit making organisation) each year to hire full-time or part-time native-speaking ELTAs to run English language activities, and to assist in the development, production, implementation and evaluation of learning/teaching/assessment activities and materials.

Evaluation

21. When the Administration briefed the Panel on the implementation progress of the NET Scheme in secondary schools and primary schools, the Administration informed members that while the Secondary NET Scheme had by and large been running smoothly and brought about positive impact, there had been some problems encountered. For example, some NETs were assigned to teach oral classes only, making it difficult for them to know the students well enough to cater for their learning needs. There had also been little professional exchange/collaboration in schools, and NETs were often forced to adopt traditional teaching methods.

22. As regards the Primary NET Scheme, the Administration informed the Panel that it had commissioned the Melbourne University in partnership with HKIEd to evaluate the implementation of the Scheme from October 2003. An in-depth longitudinal and cross-section evaluation study would be conducted at territory-wide level, with about 100 participating primary schools. The study would take three years to complete. According to the Administration, ATT observed that Primary NETs had greatly enhanced the English language learning and teaching environment, and their presence had helped create an authentic and print-rich English environment.

23. A member had asked about the basis to support the conclusion that Primary NETs had greatly enhanced the English language learning and teaching environment in primary schools. The Administration explained to the Panel that while the territory-wide level evaluation study was in progress, primary schools with NETs were required to conduct self-evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the Primary NET Scheme. ATT had conducted workshops to provide schools with guidance and support for the self-evaluation. According to feedback from principals and teachers, Primary NETs had help create an authentic and print-rich English learning environment. More English was being used in school activities and extra-curricular activities such as the English Speaking Days.

Recruitment and retention of NETs

Recruitment and retention difficulties

24. Members in general expressed concern that there were insufficient provision of NETs for the implementation of the NET schemes in secondary and primary schools. They urged the Administration to improve strategies to speed up the recruitment of NETs.

25. The Administration explained to the Panel that recruitment of NETs was conducted by a selection board consisting of a serving principal, a NET and an English subject panel chair. Video tapes, pamphlets and information kits were given to applicants to familiarise them with the education system and the working and living conditions in Hong Kong. All NETs would be arranged to attend an induction course before the beginning of school term. Starting from the 2003-04 school year, the Administration had adopted a number of measures to improve the recruitment process, including starting the annual recruitment exercise earlier, contracting out the recruitment work to overseas agencies, using information technology such as video/tele-conferencing in the final interview for recommended candidates from Australia and New Zealand, and streamlining the recruitment process. In addition, the Administration would publicise the recruitment drive through different channels, such as the Internet, Consulates, overseas tertiary institutions and their teacher unions and federations. Schools and sponsoring bodies were also encouraged to recruit NETs direct.

26. Some members pointed out that there were a large number of native English-speaking persons who were capable of teaching English in primary schools, even though they might not possess the required qualifications. They suggested that the Administration should consider providing appropriate training to these persons who were capable of and interested in teaching English for primary students so that they could contribute to enhancing the quality of English teaching in primary schools in the long run.

27. The Administration explained to the Panel that the long-term policy objective was to provide all eligible primary schools with a NET. The Administration would step up recruitment efforts so that each primary school would be allocated a NET as soon as practicable. The Administration also pointed out that the original objective of the NET Scheme was to provide qualified professionals to teach English language in primary schools. The Administration, however, was well aware that community support was paramount to enhancing student learning outcome in school education.

28. The Administration further explained to the Panel that while there would be some Primary NETs leaving the service because they had difficulties in adjusting to the local teaching or living environment, or in working with their superiors and co-workers, the vast majority of Primary NETs had left the service for professional or personal reasons. The Administration considered that an initial turnover rate of 30% to 40% was acceptable for Primary NETs as they were recruited from overseas countries on the basis of a two-year renewable contract. According to exit interviews conducted by EMB, most NETs had left the service for professional or personal reasons, rather than unsatisfactory relationship with co-workers or school management.

29. A member pointed out that the existing arrangement for one Primary NET to serve two primary schools was unsatisfactory, causing a high turnover rate. Under the arrangement, a Primary NET would have to work in two primary schools on

alternate weeks, each of which might locate at different locations and adopt different curriculum and pedagogies. He suggested that the Administration should proactively approach NETs who had indicated no interest to renew contracts to explore whether they would be willing to stay if they could teach at another school

30. The Administration pointed out that EMB had maintained close communication with NESTA. NETs who had encountered personal problem would approach NESTA or EMB for assistance. Some NETs might agree to stay on with their job if their working location could be changed.

31. A member suggested that EMB should improve its communication with Primary NETs in order to improve the retention rate. She also suggested that to encourage Primary NETs to work in Hong Kong for a longer period of time, ATT should coordinate social activities for Primary NETs so that they would have more opportunities to interact with one another and develop a stronger sense of belonging.

32. The Administration pointed out that members of ATT met Primary NETs and local English teachers on a weekly basis, and would provide advice and assistance on their work on an on-going basis.

Questions on NET Schemes and related issues

33. Members had raised a number of questions on implementation of the NET Scheme in secondary and primary schools and related issues at Council meetings. A list of these questions in chronological order is in **Appendix I**. The Official Records of Proceedings of the relevant Council meetings are available on the LegCo website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk>.

Relevant papers

34. A list of the relevant minutes of and the Administration's papers provided for the meetings of the Finance Committee and the Panel is in **Appendix II**. Soft copies of these documents are available on the LegCo website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk>.

**Questions raised at Council meetings
on/related to the NET Scheme
(since the first term of the Legislative Council)**

| <u>Date of Council Meeting</u> | <u>Question</u> |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 23.9.98 | Written question on “Recruitment of native-speaking English teachers” raised by Dr Hon David LI |
| 21.10.98 | Written question on “Provision of native-speaking English teachers for secondary schools” raised by Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung |
| 2.12.98 | Written question on “Decline in English language standard” raised by Dr Hon David LI |
| 21.4.99 | Written question on “Implementation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme” raised by Hon YEUNG Sum |
| 28.4.99 | Oral question on “Native-speaking English Teachers Scheme” raised by Hon David CHU |
| 7.7.99 | Oral question on “Native-speaking English teachers engaging in part time work” raised by Hon Kenneth TING |
| 15.3.00 | Oral question on “Wastage of teachers employed under the Native English-speaking English Teachers Scheme” raised by Hon James TIEN |
| 13.12.00 | Written question on “Working Holiday Scheme for young people of Hong Kong and with New Zealand” raised by Hon NG Leung-sing |
| 9.10.02 | Written question on “Provision of Native-English Speaking teachers and English language teaching assistants” raised by Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO |
| 10.12.03 | Written question on “NETs for primary and secondary schools” raised by Hon Abraham SHEK |

**Minutes and papers of the relevant meetings of
the Finance Committee (FC) and the Panel on Education**

| Date of meeting | Paper | LC Paper No. |
|------------------------|---|--|
| 21.11.97 | Minutes of the FC meeting | PLC Paper No. FC 73 |
| | The Administration's paper entitled "Remuneration for special appointments" | FCR(97-98)63 |
| 16.11.98 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)1313/98-99 |
| | The Administration's paper entitled "Teaching of English language in schools – Progress of measures to enhance the teaching of English language in schools" | CB(2)621/98-99(04) |
| 19.11.01 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)681/01-02 |
| | The Administration's paper entitled "2001 Policy Address: Education and Manpower" | CB(2)381/01-02(01) |
| 21.1.02 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)1173/01-02 |
| | The Administration's papers entitled "Native-speaking English Teacher and English Language Teaching Assistant Scheme in Public-sector Primary Schools" and "Progress Report on the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme in Secondary Schools" | CB(2)901/01-02(03) CB(2)901/01-02(04) |
| 16.12.02 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)902/02-03 |
| | The Administration's paper entitled "Recruitment of native-speaking English teachers" | CB(2)625/02-03(02) |
| 17.11.03 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)636/03-04 |

| Date of meeting | Paper | LC Paper No. |
|------------------------|--|---|
| | The Administration's paper entitled "Introduction of an Adjustment Mechanism for the Special Allowance under the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme" | CB(2)311/03-04(01) |
| 10.1.05 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)792/04-05 |
| | The Administration's paper entitled "Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme in Primary Schools" | CB(2)545/04-05(01) |
| 11.7.05 | Minutes of the Panel meeting | CB(2)110/05-06 |
| | The Administration's paper entitled "Updates of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme" and its letter to the Clerk to Panel dated 5 July 2005 in response to the submissions from the Native English-Speaking Teachers' Association | CB(2)2167/04-05(01) and CB(2)2191/04-05(01) |

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