

**Extract from the minutes of meeting of the Panel on Education
held on 21 January 2002**

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VI. Native-speaking English Teacher and English Language Teaching Assistants for primary schools

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)901/01-02(03) to (04)]

36. Members noted that the Administration had set out its proposal to implement a Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) and English Language Teaching Assistant (ELTA) Scheme in public-sector primary schools (including special schools) with effect from the 2002-03 school year [LC Paper No. CB(2)901/01-02(03)]. At members' request, the Administration had also provided a progress report of the NET Scheme in secondary schools [LC Paper No. CB(2)901/01-02 (04)].

NET Scheme

37. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that ED aimed to recruit about 100 NETs to fill vacancies which might arise when the contracts of about 300 serving NETs expired in August 2002. He enquired about the reasons for such a high turnover forecast and urged the Administration to examine the problems encountered by NETs.

38. Senior Assistant Director of Education (Support) (SAD of E(S)) explained that individual NETs might encounter some cultural and accommodation problems in teaching at schools in Hong Kong. Some of them might leave the service for personal reasons such as eligibility for entitlement to retirement benefits in their native countries and the like. To help NETs adapt to the local environment, ED had organised induction courses for all new NETs and other related support services for NETs. Besides, ED had set up a steering committee chaired by the Deputy Director of Education to oversee the implementation and progress of NET Scheme. He added that the general problems of NET Scheme and the measures taken to resolve them were detailed in the Annex to the progress report on the NET Scheme in secondary school.

39. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted the four possible modes of providing English language teaching support to primary schools as set out in paragraph 7 of LC Paper No. CB(2)901/01-02(03). He estimated that providing one NET for two primary schools (Mode B) would require another 400 new NETs. Given the recruitment experience of NETs, it would be very difficult to recruit

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some 500 new NETs in one exercise. He suggested that the Administration should proactively approach NETs who had indicated no interest to renew contracts and explore whether they would be willing to stay if they could teach at another school.

40. SAD of E(S) responded that ED maintained close communications with the Native English-speaking Teachers' Association (NESTA). NETs who had encountered personal problems had approached NESTA or ED for assistance. NESTA would refer NETs to ED for follow-up if considered appropriate. He acknowledged that some NETs might have changed their decision to leave and continue service when being offered with a transfer of working location.

[Note : As the Chairman had to leave the meeting for an urgent commitment, the Deputy Chairman took over the chair at this juncture.]

41. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that the Liberal Party supported extension of NET Scheme to public sector primary schools. He enquired about the role of NETs in primary schools.

42. SAD of E(S) responded that the aim of NET Scheme was to strengthen English language teaching and learning in school environment. The main roles of NETs were to enrich the language learning environment, act as a resource person to bring in effective teaching methods from overseas and assist in school-based teacher development. In a school environment, a NET should work with an experienced School English Teacher to facilitate institutionalisation of innovative and effective teaching methods and curriculum development. He added that the roles of NETs in primary schools were detailed in Annex 1 to LC Paper No.CB(2)901/01-02(03).

43. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether each primary school would be provided with a NET regardless of its size if a school-based NET was provided for each school (Mode A). He also questioned how a NET could effectively enhance the language learning environment of two schools under Mode B. Ms Emily LAU and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed a similar concern. Ms LAU urged the Administration to seriously consider the feasibility and effectiveness of allocating one NET to serve two primary schools.

44. SAD of E(S) clarified that Modes A to D were proposed in the light of practical considerations such as the readiness of schools for implementing NET Scheme in public sector primary schools. Due to a world-wide shortage of native English-speaking language teachers, ED would have difficulties in recruiting sufficient number of NETs for full implementation of Mode A from the outset. However, the Administration aimed at providing each primary school with a NET in the long term. Under the proposal for implementation, a participating primary school with sufficient operational experience under Mode B could apply for operating the Scheme under Mode A.

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45. Dr LO Wing-lok expressed support for introducing NET and ELTA Schemes in primary schools. However, he considered recruitment of sufficient NETs a very difficult task to achieve. Given their roles, NETs should possess a high level of native English-speaking competence with considerable experience in teaching English as a foreign or second language. He asked how many NETs would be required for the implementation of the Administration's proposal.

46. DE responded that the Administration would have to recruit 400 NETs to provide one NET for every two primary schools and another 20 NETs to provide peripatetic support to schools through a central Advisory Teaching Team. He acknowledged the difficulty in recruitment. However, ED would improve monitoring of the Scheme and provide better supportive services to serving NETs in anticipation of creating positive effects on recruitment of NETs in the future.

47. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for extending the NET Scheme to public sector primary schools. She considered that enhancing students' language ability was crucial to further development of Hong Kong into a world-class cosmopolitan city in the long run. She urged the Administration to review and work out effective strategies such as possible improvements to the remuneration package for competing with overseas countries in the recruitment of NETs.

48. SAD of E(S) responded that despite a global shortage of English teachers, the Administration would step up recruitment efforts by publicising the recruitment drive through different channels, such as the Internet, Consulates, overseas tertiary institutions and their teacher unions and federations. In addition, schools and sponsoring bodies were encouraged to recruit NETs direct. He pointed out that the current remuneration package for NETs comprised a basic salary equivalent to that of local graduate teachers and a number of other allowances including passage and baggage allowances. SAD of E(S) pointed out that apart from a competitive salary, a facilitative teaching environment was equally important to attract and retain NETs to work in Hong Kong.

49. Mrs Audrey EU expressed appreciation of the quality of NETs and their contributions to the teaching and learning of English in local schools. She suggested that in the face of a global shortage of English teachers, the Administration should consider recruiting non-native-speaking persons who possessed English competence equivalent to that of a native-speaker to teach or assist in teaching English in schools. She pointed out that subject to appropriate training, many retired and unemployed persons as well as temporary residents and returnees from overseas countries would be capable of teaching English language or spoken English for non-native-speaking students. She urged the Administration to exercise flexibility in the recruitment of NETs and ELTAs.

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50. DE responded that while NETs should be native English-speaking teachers of different nationalities with relevant teacher training qualifications, discretion could be exercised for individuals possessing native-speaker English competence and substantial experience in teaching English as a foreign or second language. Persons without a teacher qualification might apply to study the relevant training programmes such as those offered by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He assured members that ED would review the recruitment progress and see if it was necessary to adjust the criteria for NETs in the light of actual experience.

51. Members noted that the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research had commissioned the Hong Kong Institute of Education to conduct a study - "Monitoring and Evaluation of the Native English Teacher Scheme" from October 1998 to June 2001. Mr MAK Kwok-fung asked and SAD of E(S) confirmed that a total of 77 secondary schools and 16 primary schools were covered and the questionnaire survey had included principals, NETs and local English teachers, parents and students as survey targets. Around 80% of NETs and local English teacher responding to the survey had given positive comments on the Scheme.

52. Mr MAK Kwok-fung considered that to reduce the turnover rate of NETs, the Administration should present an overall picture of the teaching and learning environment, as well as the role of NETs in Hong Kong before their appointment.

53. SADE(S) responded that apart from video presentation during the recruitment process, ED would conduct an induction course for new appointees in August/September each year before the commencement of a new school year.

54. Ms Emily LAU took the view that learning English should start at an early age and wondered whether the Administration had adopted the right strategy in prioritising the use of resources for the NET Scheme. She asked whether the education sector would consider that teaching and learning of a non-native language should be given more weight at primary schools and also whether the Administration should consider giving priority to primary schools in the allocation of NETs in case there was a shortage.

55. DE responded that it was the established policy to implement the NET Scheme in secondary schools starting from the 1998-99 school year. The study conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Education had shown that NETs had enriched the language environment and brought in a wider variety of teaching methods in secondary schools. He agreed that the provision of good English teachers at the primary level could help students develop proficiency in English more effectively. The Administration had therefore proposed to implement the Scheme in primary schools from the 2002-03 school year.

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ELTA Scheme

56. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung enquired about the role of ELTAs in enhancing the language learning environment in primary schools. He suggested that flexibility should be considered for schools to assign capable ELTAs to teach oral conversations in junior classes.

57. DE responded that the Administration would provide a cash grant of \$150,000 to participating primary schools which were not provided with a NET, either wholly or on a sharing basis. These schools could use the special grant to hire full-time or part-time native-speaking ELTAs to organise English language activities and assist in the implementation and evaluation of English learning and teaching activities in primary schools. DE cited that the Chatteris Foundation had since 1994 assisted schools in recruitment of ELTAs who were mostly English native-speaking high school or above students (i.e. "gap students") who took time to travel overseas before pursuing further studies. These ELTAs could be deployed to assist in teaching English both inside and outside the classroom. He added that both primary and secondary schools had discretion to use the Capacity Enhancement Grant, currently at about \$500,000 a year, to recruit native-speaking English teachers to teach English language and spoken English on a needs basis.

Way forward

58. The Deputy Chairman requested the Administration to report to the Panel on the results of the current round of NET recruitment at a future meeting, which should include an analysis on factors affecting the outcome of recruitment exercise. DE undertook to brief the Panel on the recruitment progress at a Panel meeting in June/July 2002. Ms Emily LAU suggested and members agreed that the Panel should invite NETs and local English teachers to express views on the NET Scheme at the meeting.

Adm

Clerk

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Council Business Division 2
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