

For information

July 2005

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Updates of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the latest position of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme (NET Scheme).

Background

2. The NET Scheme for secondary schools was introduced in 1998, after the approval from the Legislative Council in 1997 to provide one NET over and above the teacher establishment of each public sector secondary school. The NET scheme was formally introduced to public sector primary schools in 2002/03 school year after piloting for two years. Primary schools having six or more classes are eligible for the NET provision and every pair of eligible primary schools is allocated one NET. Enhanced provision has started from the 2004/05 school year so that primary schools will gradually move to having their own NETs. The Administration last updated Members on the position of the NET Scheme in January 2005. This paper provides further updates.

Recruitment Progress

3. In the 2004/05 school year, there are 440 NETs serving in secondary schools. Each public sector secondary school has at least one NET. In the three years since the Primary NET Scheme began in 2002/03 school year, we have increased the number to 347 NETs during the 2004/05 school year in primary schools, amongst them 125 are serving in one school, and 222 are serving two schools.

4. NETs usually serve on the basis of a two-year's contract. In mid 2005, there are 154 and 146 NETs in secondary and primary schools respectively reaching the end of their current contracts. With reference to our advance survey with schools and the latest school requests, 49%, i.e. 75, and 46%, i.e. 67 of the serving NETs reaching the end of their contracts will not renew contracts in secondary and primary schools respectively at the turn of the 2005 school year. The respective

reference attrition rates in 2003/04 were 44% and 39%, meaning a modestly higher turnover rate this year. However, it should be noted the secondary NET attrition rates in 2002/03 school year and 2001/02 school year were 48% and 40%.

5. In this year's recruitment drive, 97 prospective NET candidates for secondary schools and 225 for primary schools have been identified and recommended as suitable for appointment by schools. The number of processed candidates should be sufficient to cover the positions to be left vacant by NETs who will not renew contracts. For primary schools, additional NETs over and above those who will replace NETs not renewing their contracts will be allocated to enhance the provision so that more primary schools will have their own NETs. We are mounting yet another round of recruitment to cater for withdrawal of selected appointees and vacancies arising from late resignation of serving NETs which occurs during the process. It is difficult to project the numbers who might do this at this point of time.

Survey and Evaluation

6. The remuneration package for NETs was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in 1997. In end 2003 and early 2004, we sought agreement from the Legislative Council to introduce a mechanism for the adjustment of the Special Allowance. The Special Allowance is provided mainly to assist NETs on housing expense when they come to serve in schools in Hong Kong but its rate had not been adjusted since 1997 before the adjustment mechanism was approved. In accordance with the adjustment mechanism, the NETs who had reached end of contract in mid 2004 already had their Special Allowance revised. Therefore 199 primary and 277 secondary NETs already have contracts which include the adjusted Special Allowance. However, when the same adjustment is applied for the NETs who will reach the end of their contracts in mid 2005, there have been views that the revised Special Allowance might not be sufficient in assisting NETs in meeting accommodation costs. There are also suggestions that the entire NET remuneration package is becoming less attractive in the light of various factors including salary adjustments in line with the Civil Service, rising living costs, changing currency relativities and competition with other places for professional native-speaking English teachers.

7. We have carefully revisited the parameters for readjusting the Special Allowance but believe there is no reasonable justification for not following the

approved adjustment mechanism. However, in the light of the concerns of the NET community, and taking into account the fact that the NET Scheme has been in place for several years resulting in a good number of experienced and long-serving NETs, we think it is opportune to have a critical look at whether the support and total remuneration arrangements for the NET Scheme are adequate. As such, we have conducted a survey amongst NETs to collate from them objective data on the living patterns and expenses, as well as perception evaluation data on how they feel about working in local schools. We shall evaluate the support for the NET Scheme (including remuneration package if justified) in the light of the survey results, and report back to Members following the Summer break and after discussion with the NET community.

8. Meanwhile, we will strengthen support for the NET Scheme in secondary schools, borrowing from the positive experience of having the Advisory Teaching Team to support the English panels including the NETs in primary schools. We informed Members about the evaluation study on the effectiveness of the NET Scheme in primary schools and it is progressing as planned. The evaluation study will inform us on ways to further improve and make good use of the English-speaking resources made available through the NET Scheme in schools.

Way forward

9. Members are invited to note for information the progress updates above. The Administration shall inform and consult Members on the survey and progress evaluation results of the NET Scheme in due course.

Education and Manpower Bureau

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