

SUBMISSION TO PANEL

In review of the NET Scheme (Enhanced)

- 1. The scheme has been successful in terms of:
promoting drama and theatre, debating, verse-speaking, reading programmes (PLP), professional development of LETs and NETs, kick-starting the English atmosphere in primary schools, stimulating an English ambience in secondary schools, and introducing “variety and spice” from the West.**
- 2. Problems are:
recruitment,
job satisfaction and
attrition.**
- 3. The Panel & Administration (EMB) have provided solutions:
(a) improved remuneration i.e. the R. I., and S. A. recently revised upwards,
(b) improved support vis-à-vis ATT and the RNCT;
(c) given flexibility to schools re Special Leave, exemption from meetings held in Cantonese and streamlining of paperwork procedures (salary paid on time / reimbursement of allowances expedited on time etc).**
- 4. In addition, the Administration (EMB) have:
(a) co-operated fully with NESTA in liaison;
(b) assisted with mediation;
(c) facilitated administrative transfers in dire cases;
(d) sought NESTA’s advice judiciously; and
(e) encouraged the growth of a positive and personable relationship with NESTA.**
- 5. The Committee of NESTA and I are grateful to Ralph Barnes, Raymond Sy, Sam Hui and Stephen Lai in particular for their help above and beyond the call of duty.**

6. Nonetheless, difficulties remain:

(i) recruitment: NETs must hold accredited teaching qualifications and not be purely holders of a university degree. By recruiting non-teachers, the EMB is asking for trouble. I note with approbation the submission by Chow Kam Cheung Esq., Principal. He is correct. A non-teacher should NOT be hired at all.

(ii) recruitment: selection panels should try to “weed out” applicants with unfortunate personality traits or plainly questionable psychological difficulties. Once the wrong person becomes a NET, they become a liability to their school and debase the scheme.

(iii) remuneration: the Special Allowance is plainly inadequate; NETs with children see their salary eaten up by fees at ESF or international schools, and many experienced Nets have left as this burden of fees is too heavy; the Baggage Allowance is inadequate; the Medical & Hospital Insurance Allowance is outdated.

**(iv) school-based management of NETs is in principle a good idea. However, with all respect, a minority of school principals have limited knowledge of how to assess a potential NET’s starting salary, are obsessed with NETs taking up sick leave and are unknowledgeable of visa requirements.
*An unhappy NET is worse than no NET.***

(v) the attrition rate has eased but it is still high. It will not improve unless the factors above are dealt with satisfactorily. Simply hiring extra numbers to cover the losses sounds like the Battle of The Somme, that is, not a sound use of human resources.

7. NESTA admits:

(i) the occasional personality clash can widen and end up in an irrevocable break-down in a working relationship;

(ii) the Administration has demonstrated its good faith by trying to meet NETs’ needs through regular dialogue with NESTA. We are grateful for this frank and open channel of discussion.

(iii) a very small percentage of NETs have either knowingly and / or unwisely sought to defraud the Administration in allowances.

8. Solutions:

- (i) the Administration should on moral grounds and as a further demonstration of good faith, compensate those 2004 NETs in accordance with Lee Weston and Craig Boswell's Submission;**
- (ii) NETs with children of school age must receive an allowance to educate their children;**
- (iii) the Special Allowance must be revised upwards to reflect the increased costs of residing in Hong Kong;**
- (iv) the Baggage Allowance must be increased to a realistic level;**
- (v) the Medical & Hospital Allowance must be increased and paid annually to reflect increases in medical cost;**
- (vi) the Administration should ensure those Principals who are unknowledgeable of visa requirements and/or who make rash promises with regard to salary or qualifications are informed about the relevant procedures and requirements; and**
- (vii) the Panel in its wisdom should advise the Finance Committee of the necessity to consider increases in Civil Service salaries.**

9. *Ex peroratione*:

- (i) The Committee and I do not wish to castigate the Administration unfairly: the EMB has a difficult job. Steering a path between dictating to schools and allowing them free rein is frustrating. School culture is anti – EMB; schools dislike interference. We in NESTA respect the Administration and personally take pleasure in our liaison.**

- (ii) NESTA is only too aware of NETs' shortcomings; some Westerners, (as indeed some Asians), have short tempers, and some may appear to lack Chinese politeness in the courtly sense. On the other hand your indirectness we often mistake for tardiness or a disinclination to co-operate. Cultural "sensitivity" is often acquired, not ingrained. Many NETs, however, embrace opportunities to learn from Chinese history and culture; we are not here merely to get a salary. In so many ways, we learn from the children we teach here and our colleagues we teach with just as much as they learn from us.
- (iii) NESTA too, is acutely aware of our privileged position in the social hierarchy. We understand that LETs, our esteemed colleagues and often close personal friends, feel as if we, the foreigners – the *gweilos* , as it were – are treated better than they are. The PTU has an ambivalent attitude, which we are able to understand.
- (iv) Finally, NESTA makes these requests in good faith. We do not expect instant gratification, but we do expect that our requests will be given full consideration. Notwithstanding, as teachers from diverse foreign cultures, we know that we have much to offer Hong Kong education, and in order to attract, satisfy and retain our services, the Administration, as our ultimate employer, has to recognize our needs.

I proffer this submission for your attention.

Respectfully,

Damien Piers Vance

Chairman

NESTA 16. 04. 2007