

For circulation

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme in Primary Schools and
Enhanced Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme in Secondary Schools**

Information Note

Background

The Benefits and Welfare Committee of the Native English-speaking Teachers' Association (NESTA) submitted to the Panel on Education in July 2008 a proposal to review the remuneration package for eligible native-speaking English teachers (NETs) under the NET Schemes and the qualifications for NETs under the NET Scheme in Primary Schools. This note informs Members of the progress of the above two items.

Review of the remuneration package for eligible NETs under the NET Schemes

2. We have reviewed the remuneration package of NETs including their salaries and fringe benefits. In terms of salary, the NETs are remunerated on par with local teachers at the respective basic ranks under the Master Pay Scale of the civil service and subject to the same adjustment mechanism. In view of this, the Education Bureau (EDB) does not consider it necessary to review the salary scale of NETs in isolation.
3. In terms of fringe benefits, NETs are provided with the Special Allowance (SA), contract gratuity, passage allowance, baggage allowance and medical allowance. Among these allowances, SA is the major fringe benefit which is primarily for subsidizing the accommodation expenses of NETs in Hong Kong.
4. In 2005, the Finance Committee endorsed the adjustment of SA as set out in the Paper FCR(2005-06)31, in which the Secretary for Education (SED) is delegated with the authority to approve a revision of

SA in the light of significant changes in rental prices (e.g., 10% or more), alongside other factors, such as the attrition rates of NETs, and affordability of the Government.

5. Regarding the 2007 SA review, despite an increase of more than 10% in the average rental prices in 2007, EDB proposed and the NESTA agreed to an upward adjustment of the SA by 10% (i.e., from HK\$ 12,950 per month to HK \$ 14,245 per month) owing to poor economic conditions arising from the financial tsunami. In the 2008 SA review, statistical data showed a rising average rental prices for the year 2008 despite rapidly deteriorating economic situation towards the second half of the year. In view of the global economic downturn since mid-2008, it was agreed with the NESTA that the SA will be frozen at the present rate of \$14,245 per month in the 2009/10 school year and that the average rental prices since the last SA adjustment in 2007 would be used as the baseline for the next SA review.

6. In each SA review, NESTA was consulted and accepted EDB's decision on the SA adjustment. NESTA was clearly informed that every SA review is an independent exercise. The operational parameters prescribed under the existing adjustment mechanism, as well as the schedule for the annual SA review, have also been agreed with NESTA.

7. At present there is no separate adjustment mechanism for the other benefits, which basically follow that for the civil service. Given the present serious economic downturn and the stringent policy considerations on the fringe benefits of the civil service, it would not warrant any justifiable reasons for EDB to revise the other fringe benefits of NETs.

8. During the Liaison Meeting with EDB on 8 July 2009, NESTA expressed their full understanding of the fact that given the present serious economic downturn and other policy considerations, it was not a suitable time to conduct a comprehensive review on the remuneration package of NETs under the NET Schemes in the foreseeable future.

Qualification requirements for NETs in primary schools (Primary NETs)

9. To address the concern of the public and NESTA on the qualification requirements of Primary NETs, EDB has already raised the entry qualification requirement of the primary NETs for enhancing the

quality of new recruits. Teaching English as a Foreign/ Second Language (TEFL/ TESL) at least at certificate level, among others, has become a pre-requisite requirement for appointment of a Primary NET under the NET Scheme with effect from the 2009/10 school year. As for the serving Primary NETs, Professional Upgrading Courses operated by the Hong Kong Institute of Education would be conducted in the 2009/10 school year to ensure that serving Primary NETs who are without TEFL/ TESL qualifications will fulfill the requirement within their two-year contract.

Way forward

10. EDB will continue to maintain regular liaison with NESTA to exchange views on the implementation of the NET Schemes.

Advice Sought

11. Members are invited to note the results of the review on the remuneration package of NETs and the qualifications for primary NETs as detailed in paragraphs 2 to 9.

Education Bureau
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