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Panel on Education

Meeting on 10 November 2014

**Background brief on issues related to
the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns of Members about the Native-speaking English Teacher ("NET") Scheme.

Background

2. The NET Scheme comprises the Enhanced NET Scheme in Secondary Schools ("ENET Scheme") introduced to public sector secondary schools in the 1998-1999 school year and the NET Scheme in Primary Schools ("PNET Scheme") implemented in public sector primary schools since the 2002-2003 school year. Under the NET Scheme, every public sector primary school operating six or more classes and every public sector secondary school is normally allocated one NET post.

3. NETs serve as resource teachers for enhancing the learning and teaching of English at the school level. They mainly support and collaborate with local English teachers in facilitating the implementation of the curriculum and the development of subject-related tasks, which include assisting in the design of the school-based English Language curriculum, developing learning and teaching materials, establishing resource banks, enriching the English language environment in school, enhancing the professional development of English teachers and organizing co-curricular activities.

4. As informed by the Education Bureau ("EDB") in July 2013, in the 2012-2013 school year, a total of 459 public sector primary schools and 411 public sector secondary schools participated in the NET Scheme. In the 2012-2013 financial year, the financial provisions for NETs in public sector primary and secondary schools were \$323.8 million and \$363.6 million

respectively¹. The corresponding figures for the 2013-2014 financial year were \$345.6 million and \$367.9 million respectively². According to the information provided by EDB in connection with the examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015, the number of primary NETs in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 financial years was 457 and 459 respectively; while the corresponding number of secondary NETs was 405 and 409 respectively³.

5. EDB had commissioned the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the University of Melbourne ("U of M") to conduct an evaluation study of the ENET Scheme between 1998 and 2000 and in 2008 respectively. EDB had also commissioned U of M to conduct a three-year territory-wide longitudinal evaluation study of the PNET Scheme between 2004 and 2006. As advised by EDB, the recommendations made by these evaluation studies, which addressed issues such as collaboration between NETs and local English teachers etc., had helped to improve the NET Scheme to bring about greater gains in students' English language proficiency and more positive attitudes towards English language learning. In July 2013, EDB also indicated that a more focused territory-wide evaluation would be planned for the NET Scheme to review its effectiveness and to inform the future development of the Scheme.

Members' deliberations on major issues

Implementation and effectiveness of the NET Scheme

6. At the special meeting of the Finance Committee to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014 on 12 April 2013, concern was raised that each primary school could only employ one NET to serve the entire school. There was a view that an additional NET post should be provided in each school so that all classes in Primary 1 ("P1") and P2 could be taught by NETs. EDB undertook to convey members' views to the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (i.e. "SCOLAR") for consideration.

7. In his question raised at the Council meeting of 12 December 2012, Hon Martin LIAO also asked whether the Administration had assessed if the number of NETs were sufficient to cope with the needs for teaching the English subject in all classes at all levels and to achieve the objective of enhancing students' English proficiency. In its reply, EDB highlighted that NETs were additional manpower for the English subject in their schools and served as resource

¹ See LC Paper No. CB(4)852/12-13(07).

² See LC Paper No. CB(4)116/14-15(01).

³ See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB198 for the special meeting of the Finance Committee to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015.

teachers for the subject. Classroom teaching was still primarily undertaken by the local English teachers. Having regard to the special job arrangements for NETs, EDB considered the prevailing manpower deployment of NETs appropriate⁴.

8. After commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council, when the Panel on Education ("the Panel") discussed the NET Scheme at its meeting on 9 July 2013, members gave views on the usefulness of the NET Scheme in enhancing the learning and use of English by students. While some members considered that in general, the NET Scheme had produced positive outcomes, some members questioned the effectiveness of the Scheme. There was a view that there should be a division of labour between NETs and local English teachers. The former should take charge of the English classes of all P1 and P2 students so that these children could benefit from an immersed English-speaking environment at an early age. The Administration also took note of a member's suggestion to conduct a questionnaire survey on local English teachers to ascertain whether they were in support of the aforesaid approach.

9. At the same meeting, question was raised about the policy justification for not providing NETs to special schools which had admitted students with intellectual disability. EDB had not given its comments in this regard on the ground that a judicial review against the Administration's decision of not providing NETs for these special schools was in progress at that time.

Employment of NETs by schools

10. The Panel noted that in addition to the payment of a salary on par with local teachers, eligible NETs are also provided with fringe benefits which include Special Allowance, passages, baggage allowance and medical allowance. According to some members, the remuneration package of an NET was comparable to the salary of a vice school principal, while the responsibilities and workload of NETs were much lighter than those of local teachers. However, NETs had no prospect of advancement. Some members considered that these issues should be further examined.

11. Concern was raised about the wastage of NETs and the difficulties experienced by some NETs in integrating into their schools and life in Hong Kong. According to the Administration, NETs were normally engaged on two-year contracts. They usually stayed in Hong Kong for five to six years. About 16% to 17% of NETs would not renew their contracts. On whether schools could be given greater flexibility in engaging NETs, the Administration

⁴ See the Secretary for Education's reply to a written question (LCQ8) raised by Hon Martin LIAO at the Council meeting on 12 December 2012.

advised that individual schools could either recruit NETs on their own or entrust EDB to recruit NETs on their behalf.

12. Some members considered that NETs should not be engaged merely because they were native English speakers. Consideration should also be given to their professional qualifications and experience in language teaching. Resources allocated for engaging NETs should also include resources for grooming local English teachers, while schools should also be given the option to engage local teachers specialized in teaching English to assume the functions of NETs. As explained by the Administration, for appointment as NETs, applicants had to fulfil requirements relating to professional qualifications and experience. As far as the need to groom local English teachers was concerned, while every opportunity would be taken to provide training for local English teachers, they could not substitute NETs in providing the necessary English language environment in schools.

Latest developments

13. The Administration will update the Panel on the latest developments and operation of the NET Scheme at the meeting to be held on 10 November 2014.

Relevant papers

14. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council Website is at the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
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List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	12.12.2012	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 79 - 83 (Question 8)
Finance Committee	12.4.2013	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014 (Reply serial number : EDB117, 214, 238 and 258) Minutes
Panel on Education	9.7.2013 (Item V)	Agenda CB(4) 852/12-13(07) Minutes
Finance Committee	4.4.2014	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015 (Reply serial number : EDB109, 198 and 304)