

For discussion
on 31 March 2025

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Enhancing the Implementation of
the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme, and the proposed enhancement measures to be implemented starting from the 2025/26 school year.

Background

2. The Government is committed to developing Hong Kong into an international education hub to serve as a bridge between the country and the rest of the world, and is proactively building Hong Kong an international hub for high-calibre talents, so as to complement the country's goal of building China into a leading country in education by 2035, and further bolster our "gold-plated reputation" in education. The annual "Two Sessions" this year have emphasised that the country's further expansion of high-standard opening-up will bring about new development opportunities, and that Hong Kong has to reinforce our role as an important bridge and window for connecting the Mainland with the rest of the world. Therefore, it is important that we should create a favourable environment for the nurturing of biliterate and trilingual talents, so as to contribute Hong Kong's strength to the country.

3. All along, the Government attaches great importance to the enhancement of students' English proficiency through various initiatives to strengthen English language learning and teaching. These include the implementation of the NET Scheme in the public sector secondary and primary schools in the 1998/99 and 2002/03 school years respectively. Under the NET Scheme, all public sector secondary schools and public sector primary schools having six or more classes are provided with one NET post within the staff establishment. The Scheme aims to, among other things, enhance the effectiveness in the learning and teaching of English and increase students' exposure to the language by providing an authentic English

environment. Since the inception of the Scheme, we have attracted many native English-speaking talents with diverse academic and cultural backgrounds to join the teaching force of Hong Kong. They help improve the overall effectiveness of the learning and teaching of English, enhance students' English proficiency as well as increase students' confidence in and motivation of learning and using English. To enable the Government to make more flexible and effective use of the valuable resources of the NET Scheme and to enhance the effectiveness and flexibility of public financial resources, we have reviewed the administrative arrangements of the Scheme on the basis of the well-established foundation of the NET Scheme, with the objective of further enriching the English environment in schools through quality enhancement, quantity enhancement, and diversification, so as to raise the overall quality of English teaching and nurture more talents who are biliterate and trilingual.

Existing NET Scheme

4. There are about 470 and 380 NETs serving in the public sector primary and secondary schools in the 2024/25 school year respectively. The current remuneration package for NETs under the NET Scheme includes basic salary¹, contract gratuity and retention incentive (RI). For NETs whose normal place of residence is established as being outside Hong Kong, they will be eligible for a special allowance, passage/baggage allowance and medical allowance. NETs are normally offered a 2-year contract with their employing schools. Schools and NETs will discuss whether to continue with their employment approaching the end of the contracts.

Deployment of NETs

5. Based on the information collected from schools at the end of the 2023/24 school year, it is noted that a NET on average took up about 20 lessons per week, with over 90% of them mainly focused on teaching reading and speaking classes in primary schools, while over 95% of them teaching mainly speaking classes in secondary schools. Besides, about 20% and 10% of primary and secondary NETs taught other classes such as phonics, drama, debate, and interview skills respectively. NETs bring into the English lessons of our local schools their professional experience, diversified teaching strategies and concepts, and cultural literacy that can help enrich students' language learning experiences and the English learning environment.

¹ For NETs in primary schools, their salaries are pegged at Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (APSM) in aided primary schools, i.e. Master Pay Scale (MPS) points 15-29. As for NETs in secondary schools, their salaries are pegged at Graduate Master/Mistress (GM) in aided secondary schools NET, i.e. MPS points 15-33.

6. Most schools deploy the NETs under the Scheme to collaborate with the English panel members to support English learning, with some schools optimise and consolidate the resources by deploying various government resources to engage additional NETs and English Language Teaching Assistants (ELTAs) to form a NET team to accommodate different development needs of schools and the diverse learning needs of students.

7. Under the NET Scheme, NETs, as resource teachers, collaborate with local English teachers (LETs) and play a complementary role in enhancing the effectiveness of the learning and teaching of English. NETs support and collaborate with LETs to develop and implement the school-based English language curriculum, and enrich the English Language environment in schools. They can also help enhance the professional development of English teachers and organise co-curricular activities.

Review of the Administration of the NET Scheme

8. Over the past two decades, the education landscape of Hong Kong has evolved in a high speed, influenced by the new curriculum development, rapid advancement in information technology, and significant enhancement in the qualifications and professional capability of LETs. Learning now extends beyond traditional classroom settings. The role of NETs in supporting students' English learning extends far beyond merely motivating students to learn English in the classroom. NETs need to keep up with the times to meet the diverse needs of all students.

9. Given these changes, the Education Bureau (EDB) is proactively reviewing the administration of the Scheme to enhance its effectiveness and ensure that it meets the actual needs of the education sector. A Task Force on Review of NET Scheme was set up in September 2023 to review the management of the Scheme, qualification and training requirements of NETs, as well as their remuneration package with a view to identifying the most effective way to make good use of NET resources, and drawing up proposals to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the learning and teaching of English for the benefits of students. Key review findings are summarised as follows:

More flexibilities in deployment of resources

10. All along, schools are provided with one NET post within the staff establishment. While schools generally agreed that the provision of NET is essential

to cater schools' and students' needs, there are views on enhancing the management of the Scheme and requests for more flexibility in the deployment of resources so that additional learning support services can be purchased to suit school-based circumstances on top of manpower resources for the benefit of students in the learning of English Language in all aspects. Similar to other EDB policies for supporting students, schools expected that the resources on NET Scheme could be used more flexibly hence effectively.

11. From daily contact with schools, focus group meetings and school visits, a few good practices of schools on recruitment and deployment of NETs are collected. For example, some schools consolidate other resources to engage additional NETs and ELTAs with different backgrounds, cultures, and expertise to bring in a wider variety of learning and teaching ideas conducive to motivating students to learn English in an authentic language environment. In addition, some schools encourage the ELTAs to acquire appropriate teacher training and join the NET Scheme, or apply for regular posts within the staff establishment for greater job stability and promotion prospects. It is of the view that a collaborative environment with NETs, ELTAs and LETs as a team will enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching of English Language, ultimately benefitting students' learning.

Upholding the professionalism of NETs

12. Schools value the presence of capable and high-quality NETs under the NET Scheme. The recent shifts in learning and teaching methods, especially in the post-pandemic period and with the rise of artificial intelligence, have positioned the education sector to enhance English learning with a quality teaching workforce. While the quality of LETs has significantly improved with the recommendations from the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research on the training and qualifications of language teachers and the implementation of the policy of Language Proficiency Requirement, there is a desire to elevate NET qualifications to match those of LETs. This would attract more qualified NETs to Hong Kong's teaching workforce and enable them to collaborate effectively with LETs in curriculum development and professional growth.

Consolidation of RI and Gratuity

13. The RI was introduced in the 2005/06 school year as an additional measure to tackle the high turnover rate and large-scale recruitment needs when the attrition rate of primary and secondary NETs reached 46% and 53% respectively after the 2004/05 school year, which were the highest since inception of the Scheme. Since the 2005/06 school year, the RI has been offered to NETs, amounting to 5% of their

basic salary for the 3rd and 4th year of service, and 10% for the 5th year onwards, paid on monthly basis. Nevertheless, in recent years, the attrition rate of NETs in public sector primary and secondary schools is in a decreasing trend. The position in the past three school years is set out below:

School Year	Attrition Rate ²	
	Primary School	Secondary School
2021/22	18%	16%
2022/23	9%	7%
2023/24	8%	6%

14. Given the stabilised and low attrition rate of NETs in recent years and the shared purpose of RI and contract gratuity, the EDB should review the effectiveness and justifications of the RI in retaining NETs on a continual basis³ and consider consolidating the two incentives in order to make prudent use of public money.

Enhancement Measures

15. In view of the above findings, we propose enhancements in the administration of the NET Scheme. The interests of our students are our primary consideration. The aims of the enhancement measures for the NET Scheme are to uphold the high standards of professionalism among NETs and maintain the quality of the Scheme, as well as allow schools more flexibilities to optimise resources for enhancing English language learning environment in schools. Details are elaborated in ensuing paragraphs.

16. Starting from the 2025/26 school year, a new Native-speaking English Teacher Grant (NET Grant) will be introduced to allow public sector primary and secondary schools to opt between (i) retaining the existing NET post; or (ii) receiving a new NET Grant with reference to school-based circumstances. Eligible schools⁴ are allowed to choose between the two options when the contracts with NETs or

² Attrition rate refers to the number of NETs leaving the NET Scheme for reasons other than retirement as a percentage of the total number of NETs completing the contract in that particular school year. It does not include NETs who transferred to another school, reached the retirement age upon completing their contracts, or left before the completion of their contracts.

³ LC Paper No. CB(2)109/05-06(01) refers.

⁴ According to the existing NET Scheme, all public sector secondary schools and public sector primary schools having six or more classes are eligible.

service providers are completed. This flexible and reversible arrangement will enable schools to tailor their manpower resources to better meet their students' needs.

Retaining the Existing NET Post

17. Under this option, schools can choose to retain their current serving NETs or engage NETs under the Scheme transferring from other schools. As these NETs will continue to serve without a break in service, the existing qualification requirements and remuneration package will remain unchanged. This arrangement will enable schools to maintain the continuity and stability of their NETs, as well as retain the valuable experience and expertise of the serving NETs in the sector.

Uplifting qualification requirements (for newly-joined NETs)

18. For newly-joined NETs⁵ starting from the 2025/26 school year, the qualification requirements will be uplifted. This enhancement aims to align the qualification requirements for NETs with those of LETs, which will improve the overall quality of learning and teaching of English language, and empower NETs to serve as resource persons who can collaborate effectively with LETs on curriculum development and support the professional growth of the English panel members. Newly-joined NETs are required to possess the following qualifications:

- (i)(a) a relevant Bachelor's degree majoring in the study of English⁶ from a Hong Kong university, or equivalent; **or**
- (i)(b) a Bachelor's degree in any subjects, and a higher degree majoring in the study of English⁶ or related subject from a Hong Kong university, or equivalent; **and**
- (ii) a Post-graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) majoring in English Language⁷, or equivalent; **and**
- (iii) a Teaching English as a Foreign / Second Language (TEFL /

⁵ Newly-joined NETs are those not serving under the Scheme in the 2024/25 school year.

⁶ A relevant Bachelor's degree/higher degree includes:

- degrees specifically in the study of the English language (including English studies, English literature, and linguistics);
- degrees in education with specialism in English;
- degrees in the communicative use of English; and
- degrees in translation with English as one of the principal languages studied.

⁷ Relevant teacher training means recognised teacher training with specialism in English and supervised practicum in English teaching.

TESL) qualification at least at certificate level, or equivalent.

Removal of RI and introduction of a two-tier rate of contract gratuity (for newly-joined NETs)

19. The remuneration package for newly-joined NETs is largely similar to the current package, except that the RI will be removed, and a two-tier rate of contract gratuity will be introduced⁸. Having considered that the introduction of the RI in 2005 was a response to high attrition rates among NETs at that time, while the recent attrition rates have been stabilised at below 10%, the EDB has decided to combine RI and the gratuity as the remuneration package for newly-joined NETs as they shared the same purpose in retaining NETs to continue their services. This streamlined approach will ensure a competitive remuneration package while aligning with the contract terms of other professional grades in the government, thereby enhancing the efficacy in deploying public financial resources.

Receiving a New NET Grant

20. Under this option, schools can choose to receive a new NET Grant for employing at least one NET, and engaging more native-speaking English Teaching Assistants (NTAs) and/or engaging English learning support services that suit school-based circumstances by using remaining funds, if any. The NET Grant is a purpose-specific grant disbursed to schools every school year, with an ambit aligned with the objectives of the NET Scheme. It aims to expand the entry pathways to attract more native English speakers with diverse academic and cultural backgrounds to join the teaching profession in Hong Kong, enabling schools to form a dynamic team of NETs and NTAs to suit the needs of schools and students. Schools are encouraged to make innovative approaches in creating an English-rich environment, so as to enhance student motivation and engagement in English learning.

21. By engaging a broader range of native-speaking English talents through the NET Grant, schools can enhance students' language learning experiences by offering a variety of innovative learning activities in authentic English-speaking environment;

⁸ The rates of the two-tiered gratuity are as follows:

- For NETs serving in the 1st and 2nd contracts: 10% of total current basic salary (when added to the employer's contribution to the Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme) paid over the contract period payable on satisfactory completion of each contract;
- For NETs serving after 2 contracts: 15% of total current basic salary (when added to the employer's contribution to the Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme) paid over the contract period payable on satisfactory completion of each contract and upon fulfilling training requirements for newly-joined teachers within first three years of services.

and connect students' learning of English with other subjects and real life using a language-across-the-curriculum (LAC) approach in learning and teaching and promoting English learning through co-curricular activities. For instance, schools can arrange for students to engage in project learning on environmental issues and ask them to conduct the research, from gathering information, data analysis to presentation of findings, all in English, so as to enhance their ability in using English in all aspects. Besides, through STEAM⁹ learning activities, students can design, build, and program a simple robot to perform specific tasks, integrating STEAM principles while using English as the primary language for instruction and communication. NETs with diverse subject expertise can explain the scientific principles behind their designs and the technology used in programming while reinforcing students' language skills by helping students to write descriptions or stories about their robots using an integrated approach, providing them with a well-rounded and diversified learning experience. Moreover, a collaborative environment will also be strengthened through the expanded team comprising NET team and LETs.

22. The new NET Grant is benchmarked against the mid-point salary of APSM in aided primary schools, and GM in aided secondary schools respectively¹⁰. \$0.9m and \$1m will be provided for an eligible primary and secondary school respectively for each school year. Schools should determine the remuneration package taking into account the NETs' qualifications, teaching experiences and background, level of responsibilities, etc. as comparable to teachers taking up similar duties employed by schools.

23. Schools may employ the NETs direct as contract teachers, or engage service providers to provide recruitment services or provide NETs as their employers. The NET employed under the Grant should meet the following basic qualifications in order to meet the schools' development needs and students' learning needs:

- (i) a Bachelor's degree in any subject from a Hong Kong university, or equivalent; **and**
- (ii) a PGDE or a TEFL / TESL qualification at least at certificate level, or equivalent; **and**
- (iii) valid IELTS results (overall band score of 7.5 or above, with

⁹ STEAM is an acronym that refers to the academic disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. Arts include Music and Visual Arts subjects.

¹⁰ The salary scale of APSM rank ranges from Master Pay Scale (MPS) Pt. 15 to 29 (i.e. from HK\$35,080 to HK\$67,850 per month). The salary scale of GM rank ranges from MPS Pt. 15 to 33 (i.e. from HK\$35,080 to HK\$81,510 per month). Those without a local PGDE or equivalent will not be permitted to proceed beyond a salary bar at MPS Pt. 20.

“Speaking” band score of 7.5 or above).

24. Teachers employed under the NET Grant who possess degrees in subjects other than English will be encouraged to pursue relevant qualifications. For those aspiring to build a long-term career in Hong Kong, they may choose to join the NET posts under the Scheme, or serve as a regular teacher as APSM or GM in aided schools according to their expertise and further qualifications acquired. These alternative pathways support their long-term career development by providing promotion prospects compared to the current NET posts, retaining talents while expanding the teaching profession in Hong Kong by attracting more qualified professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise.

25. Schools should maximise the use of the NET Grant disbursed each school year in a timely manner to support the English learning of students in that school year. Therefore, in principle, schools should not accumulate an excessive surplus of the Grant. If schools have accumulated a surplus in excess of 30% of the 12 months’ provision of the NET Grant, the surplus above this amount will be clawed back at the end of the school year.

26. Schools are required to adopt a holistic approach based on their specific needs to make prudent decisions when opting for retaining a NET post or receiving the NET Grant. For schools receiving the NET Grant, an annual school plan and school report endorsed by their Incorporated Management Committees (IMC) / School Management Committee (SMC) should be submitted for monitoring purpose.

Consultation with Stakeholders

27. Focus group meetings with major stakeholders have been conducted¹¹ to gather feedback on the implementation of the Scheme and the proposed enhancement measures. In general, the school sector supports the enhanced flexibility offered to better allocate resources for English language learning. The Grant option allows schools to optimise resources by expanding support from one NET to a team of NETs and NTAs with diverse backgrounds, cultures and expertise, enriching the English-speaking environment in schools and benefiting student learning. Schools can also pool together additional resources to strengthen the support for English learning and teaching according to their needs. Furthermore, schools appreciate the flexibility offered by the reversible option to either maintain a NET position or receive the NET

¹¹ Focus group meetings with major school-sponsoring bodies, school councils, NET associations, school principals, heads of English panels, NETs and LETs have been organised.

Grant, depending on the employment situation of NETs each year and the year-on-year changing needs, enabling them to adapt to changing needs and developments of schools and students flexibly.

Way Forward

28. We propose the enhancement measures for the NET Scheme to commence in the 2025/26 school year. The EDB will closely monitor the implementation of the enhancement measures in order to ensure the most effective use of NET resources, with the aim of enhancing the learning and teaching of English language to meet the diverse needs of schools and students, ultimately benefiting their learning. The EDB will timely review the effectiveness of the enhancement measures having regard to the actual situation.

Advice Sought

29. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

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