

LCQ16: Demand and supply situation of native-speaking English teachers

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (April 6):

Question:

The Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented since 1998 the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme (NET Scheme) in public-sector primary and secondary schools to provide one native-speaking English teacher (NET) post for each public-sector primary and secondary school that meets the relevant criteria. It is learnt that given the prolonged closure of boundary control points due to the ongoing epidemic in Hong Kong, there has been an imbalance in the demand for and supply of NETs caused by quite a number of NETs leaving Hong Kong for reasons of homesickness or family reunion, etc. on the one hand, and the difficulties faced by schools in recruiting NETs from overseas to fill the vacancies on the other. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of retention and attrition of NETs in public-sector primary and secondary schools and the corresponding percentages, in each of the past five school years; the projection of the relevant figures for the current and next school years;
- (2) of the EDB's measures to resolve the problem of demand-supply imbalance of NETs;
- (3) as quite a number of schools have relayed that the long period of compulsory quarantine required to be undergone by persons arriving from overseas to Hong Kong has been the main reason for NETs' leaving the service or their reluctance to come and teach in Hong Kong during the epidemic, of the corresponding countermeasures put in place by the EDB; and
- (4) given that it has been over four years since the Government completed in 2016 and 2017 respectively its evaluation of the "NET Scheme in Primary Schools" and the "Enhanced NET Scheme in Secondary Schools" under the NET Scheme, whether the EDB has plans to conduct the relevant evaluation afresh with a view to reviewing the objectives and effectiveness of the NET Scheme in a timely manner, thereby ensuring the proper use of education resources; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government introduced the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme to public sector secondary schools and primary schools in the 1998/99

and 2002/03 school years respectively. Since its implementation, schools have been able to enrich students' learning experiences in language learning, strengthen the English learning environment through the professional experience, diversified teaching strategies and ideas, and cultural literacy brought by NETs. NETs have also collaborated with local English teachers in enhancing curriculum development, as well as strategies in language learning and teaching and assessment. Starting from early 2020, schools and the society as a whole have been facing various new challenges arising from the outbreak of COVID-19 in Hong Kong. Our most urgent task at the moment is to consolidate the efforts of different sectors to fight against the epidemic. In this regard, we strive to strengthen communication with the school sector so as to work with schools and teachers (including the NETs) in the combat against the epidemic.

Our reply to the Hon Michael Tien's question is as follows:

(1) The respective rates of retention and attrition of NETs in primary and secondary schools in the past five school years are set out below:

School Year	Retention Rate*		Attrition Rate#	
	Primary School	Secondary School	Primary School	Secondary School
2016/17	84 per cent	81 per cent	13 per cent	9 per cent
2017/18	85 per cent	83 per cent	14 per cent	10 per cent
2018/19	84 per cent	82 per cent	11 per cent	8 per cent
2019/20	80 per cent	86 per cent	16 per cent	9 per cent
2020/21	86 per cent	82 per cent	11 per cent	13 per cent

*Retention rate refers to the percentage as calculated by the number of NETs who have their contracts renewed upon expiry against the total number of NETs completing the contracts in that particular school year.

#Attrition rate refers to the percentage as calculated by the number of NETs opting not to renew their contracts and leaving the NET Scheme for reasons other than retirement against the total number of NETs completing the contract in that particular school year.

As the rates of retention and attrition of NETs are generally calculated after the end of a school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) does not have the statistics for this and the coming school year at this stage.

(2) As seen from the above statistics, the rates of retention and attrition of NETs have been largely stable and there is no imbalance of demand and supply at this stage. Under the NET Scheme, apart from the basic salary, eligible NETs are entitled to various fringe benefits including special allowance, passage, baggage allowance, medical allowance, gratuity and cash retention incentive. The remuneration package is considered very attractive and can encourage NETs to continue their service. In addition, we have also provided support for NETs in different aspects, including professional

development, learning and teaching, as well as facilitating their communication with teachers in their schools and NETs across schools, with a view to fostering for them a caring and supportive work environment, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging to their schools and Hong Kong.

On the other hand, to help schools that need to retain or recruit suitable NETs, we will exercise discretion to allow NETs at retirement age to continue teaching in Hong Kong and allow the employment of temporary NETs to fill NET vacancies. We will continue to maintain close liaison with schools to provide advice and support on the employment of NETs.

(3) There may be various reasons for NETs choosing to leave their service. They may include retirement, family reunion and the wish to work or live in other countries. The decision of NETs to take up teaching posts in Hong Kong or not depends on their personal considerations. For NETs planning to come and teach in Hong Kong, they will become part of Hong Kong's community. We hope that they will join us in the fight against the epidemic. The compulsory quarantine arrangement upon arrival in Hong Kong is an important part of our anti-epidemic efforts to prevent imported cases. We trust that NETs will be willing to co-operate. Therefore, there are no substantive grounds for attributing the departure of NETs or their decision to or not to come to teach in Hong Kong to our compulsory quarantine measure. In fact, although the recruitment of NETs has been affected by the global pandemic in the past two years, we still have sufficient NETs to fill the vacancies and maintain a stable team of NETs. It is expected that we can still be able to recruit sufficient NETs to meet the demand of public sector schools in the 2022/23 school year.

(4) According to the large-scale evaluations completed by the EDB in 2016 and 2017 respectively, the two schemes had a positive impact on the pedagogy and professional development of local English teachers, students' attitude and motivation in English language learning and the English learning environment. The reports recommended that the EDB should strengthen support on areas including professional collaboration, professional development of teachers and publicity of the schemes. In fact, the EDB has been enhancing school-based support services in recent years to promote professional collaboration and innovation in learning and teaching, including the launch of a newly developed multi-media e-platform for the NET Scheme, with a view to providing schools with a rich source of information, learning and teaching resources and online self-learning teacher professional development programmes, as well as increasing public awareness of the two schemes. Furthermore, the Primary NET Deployment Guidelines has also been revised, and the revision of the Secondary NET Deployment Guidelines will soon be completed. According to the annual survey, primary and secondary schools in general were satisfied with the enhanced support services. The EDB will review the implementation of the NET Scheme in an ongoing manner through various channels such as school visits, school inspections, professional development programmes and quest.