

Academic staff lash at panel's criticisms of vice-chancellor

BY NEIL COLCLOUGH

STAFF of the University of Science and Technology have hit back at a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report which criticised the university's vice-chancellor, Professor Woo Chia-wei.

Woo came under fire from Martin Lee, Leong Che-hung and Emily Lau for adopting the design submitted by the second runner-up, in preference to the winning entry in a competition to design the university.

University planning and co-ordination director, Professor Peter Dobson, said "it is a leap of faith" to accuse Woo of contributing to the cause of the \$1.6 billion cost over-run.

Dobson said there was no evidence to suggest Woo "forced" the other members

of the planning committee to choose the runner-up's design.

"I'm sure he (Woo) made a good case of his views but he was put in charge of the university and so had a legitimate right to express his opinions," Dobson said.

Dobson said the planning committee voted 15 to 0 in a secret ballot to award the contract to the runner-up.

"At best the architect's design was peripheral to the cost over-run because at the time (of the competition) the cost estimates were approximately the same," he said.

But Professor Eric Lye, an architect previously involved in the joint venture which won the design competition, said he was "shocked" when the runner-up was chosen.

"It's like riding the winning horse but seeing the second

placed horse chosen because it is more beautiful," said Lye, dean of architecture at Hongkong University.

"By the nature of our design I would say it would not have incurred the same scale of over-run costs as the chosen one did," he said.

Lye said Woo was too influential in deciding which design was chosen.

"He made a statement that 'I'm the president (of the university) and I'm going to live there'. This shocked me," Lye said.

Lye was an architect with the firm of Lotus which submitted a design in a joint venture with Design Consultants and Wong and Ouyang (Hongkong).

The contract was awarded to the joint venture of Simon Kwan and Associates and Percy Thomas Partnership.