

\$13.5m facelift 'not worth it'

By Antoine So

THE Director of Audit has criticised the administration for misspending on a \$13.5 million Northcote Education Institute facelift project.

An audit report pointed out that the fund was granted despite the fact the future Hong Kong Education Institute (HKEI) — to which Northcote will become part — would move to a Tai Po site in 1998.

Questions on how the government reached the decision to renovate Northcote's Pok Fu Lam teaching college are contained in Audit Report No 26, to be tabled today in the Legislative Council.

The project dates back to June 1993, when the government applied for renovation funding.

On 11 June 1993, the Public Accounts Committee earmarked \$16 million for the renovation work, which was completed in June last year.

The actual expenditure for the facelift was \$13.5 million.

Director of Audit Dominic Chan said the administration had failed to notify the accounts committee on the concurrent proposal to combine the five education institutes into the future HKEI, which will be based in Tai Po, before submitting the funding request.

Members of the committee were denied the following information:

■ The proposal by the Education Commission to combine the five education institutes to strengthen Hong Kong's teachers' education training.

■ The appointment by the Governor of a HKEI provisional management committee for the setting up of the future autonomous Education Institution in March 1993.

■ The government's plan to look for HKEI's future site.

The report added that pending the timetable from the HKEI provisional management committee, the government should have requested the accounts

committee to delay the debate on the renovation project of Northcote on 10 June 1993.

At that time, opinion was available from the special working group on campus development on the renovation of Northcote Education Institute.

The group had concluded the need to develop a separate campus for the future HKEI, despite recommendations from the Director of Architectural Services on the possibility of renovating existing campuses.

The group also said consideration of any renovation should await the final decision on the HKEI's future site.

The Northcote renovation

was scheduled for completion in January 1995.

The auditor's report said the government should have known that the renovated Northcote site would be used for less than three years.

The Director of Audit said the administration should have acted on the 4 September 1993 proposal from the HKEI provisional management committee to provide the accounts committee with additional information about the renovation of Northcote.

The Director of Audit concluded that the renovation of Northcote was not worth it since the PAC had made a decision on the funding without sound accurate information.

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