

Anger over shelving of academics' work

By Ella Lee

A GROUP of academics has accused the Wan Chai District Board of shelving a crucial social research project because of the political leanings of some of its members.

The research, started in November last year, was examining social service needs in Wan Chai district.

It was being conducted by a team composed of seven academics at the City Polytechnic and Chinese University, and included three members of the United Democrats.

Wan Chai District Board chairman and independent legislator Peggy Lam defended the decision to defer the project because of the upcoming district board elections.

Mrs Lam said the board considered it too sensitive to commission research by people who had political affiliations.

The research involved apolitical household information, she said.

But Dr John Tse, from the City Polytechnic and a member of the United Democrats, said the incident was "a perfect example of political discrimination".

"The decision allegedly implies that I would disclose the results inappropriately, which makes me more of a spy than an academic," Dr Tse said. "My personal integrity has been insulted and I feel aggrieved."

Another team member, Dr Alex Kwan said the district board had sufficient power to monitor bias in their work and that it should not vet the political leaning of researchers.

Mrs Lam stressed that she had not reflected or questioned the professional competence of the researchers.

"It is not a problem beyond the election period. But now we have to do something to avoid any suspicion of giving benefits to a particular political party," she said.