

Campus tenancy renewal for Academy for Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University

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In 2004, the Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) rented the former Royal Air Force Officers' Mess, a grade I historic building, with the HKSAR Government at concessionary monthly rent HK\$50,000. The tenancy period was 5 years. In 2005, the Mess, dubbed "Kai Tak Campus", was deployed as the Academy for Visual Arts (AVA) campus. The deployment of this historic building for academic purpose was in 2009 credited the UNESCO "Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation (Honourable Mention)". Since the first agreement, the tenancy had been twice renewed and would be expiring in September 2012. The Government Property Agency requested HKBU to renew the tenancy at HK\$300,000 per month, an amount comparable to property market rate. HKBU Administration hence planned for releasing Kai Tak Campus and relocating AVA to the Communication and Visual Arts (CVA) Building at the HKBU Kowloon Tong main campus cluster. AVA students were apprehensive of the sub-optimal facilities at the CVA Building. They formed "HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group" to lobby for the conservation of Kai Tak Campus. The Group organised artworks auction to fund-raise rent for the Campus. In August, the incident was resolved with the Education Bureau taking over as landlord and renewed the tenancy agreement with HKBU for 1 year. Monthly rent remained at HK\$50,000.

Information:

- Local newspaper. For details of newspaper coverage please see Chinese version
- Facebook

Photo courtesy of HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group

2012/05

• On 2 May

The *Oriental Daily* reported that as the protest of AVA students to Mrs. Carrie Lam, Secretary for Development Bureau, drew attention of the community, Albert Chan, President of HKBU, sent an email to all academic staff and students on 30 April. He proposed two plans for the continuous use of Kai Tak Campus: one was to apply for heritage revitalisation status for the campus and to use it as a venue for further community arts promotion; second was to share the campus with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) so as to minimise the amount of rent HKBU needed to bear. AVA would occupy the space required for large-scale equipment and work studios. HKADC would use its share of campus space as office. The remainder exhibition space would be shared by AVA and HKADC.

Cheng King-wai, Chairman of HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group expressed that AVA would only have access to 40% of Kai Tak Campus space if shared with the HKADC, excluding galleries and student workshops. He hoped the HKBU Administration would strive for the optimal arrangement. The Concern Group would closely monitor the development of the revitalisation proposal and consult teaching staff and students (of their opinions).¹

2012/06

- On 22 June

During a press conference, HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group told the press that HKBU Administration had expressed the intention to rent Kai Tak Campus on a long-term basis, should the Government continue to offer the rental concession. The Concern Group requested HKBU Administration to renew the tenancy for the entire campus for 1 year. LegCo Member Leong Kah-kit Alan, who had been showing his support to the students, expressed that he would inform Mrs. Carrie Lam, Secretary for Development Bureau, of this incident. He also said that as the visual arts museum would be an important attraction of West Kowloon Cultural District, the Government should renew the tenancy with AVA at concession rent.

Cheung King-wai of HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group expressed that HKBU Administration would be unable to resolve the space deficiency problem should it only rent part of the campus in the subsequent year. He said that the Concern Group would produce a piece of artwork of 10-feet in height, with which the Group would participate in the 1 July rally, to express its disappointment with the Government deploying large amount of resources to West Kowloon Cultural District while failing to support AVA. The Group would also ask the community to sign up for support for the permanent conservation of Kai Tak Campus.²

- On 26 June

Wong Ying-kay Ada, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture, published an article in *Ming Pao Daily*. She commented the current situation of advanced level visual arts education in Hong Kong. She referred to the recommendations in the 2002 final report on “A Feasibility Study on Setting up a Visual Arts Academy in Hong Kong” and how the AVA, which was built subsequent to the report, deviated from those recommendations.³

2012/07

- On 1 July

HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group displayed a model of Kai Tak Campus during the 1 July rally, to express its disappointment with the Government deploying large amount of resources to West Kowloon Cultural District while failing to support AVA.⁴

- On 9 July

The *Hong Kong Economic Times* reported that according to a HKBU spokesperson, moving AVA to the CVA Building had long been planned for by HKBU Administration. Cheung King-wai responded that the students had never been informed of such a plan. He also stated that it would be unrealistic to relocate the entire AVA to CVA Building because that building did not have the space required for heavy machinery and equipment required for arts creation.

Cheung King-wai further stated that it would be inappropriate for AVA and HKADC to co-rent Kai Tak Campus. He was apprehensive that the noise and smell created during students' arts creation would interfere with HKADC's general office work in the campus. The Concern Group saw a conflict of interest for Wong Ying-wai Wilfred, concurrently the Chairman of HKBU Board of Directors and Chairman of HKADC, to be involved in the decision making process of relocating AVA. HKBU spokesperson disagreed and said that there had not been any conflict of interest because both roles that Wilfred Wong held were public employment and there was no “interest” involved. The spokesperson also stated that important decisions related to HKBU and HKADC had to be discussed and approved respectively by the HKBU Board of Directors and the HKADC Council.

LegCo Member Leong Kah-kit Alan publicly supported the students as he found the Concern Group's request reasonable. He suggested that bureaucratic mentality had caused the Government Property Agency's decision to ask for a market-value rental. Leong revealed that he had approached Carrie Lam, the then Secretary for Development Bureau, for this incident. Leong said, "Lam's opinion was to 'maintain status quo' as the Campus deployment had been credited the *UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation (Honourable Mention)* in 2009. It proved that a balance had been achieved in the revitalisation of this historical building."⁵

- **On 22 July**

AVA students organised talks and raised fund with performance arts on Mongkok Pedestrian Street. Over HK\$10,000 was raised.⁶

- **On 26 July**

Hui Hoi-kiu, a representative of HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group, told *Ming Pao Daily* that the HKBU Administration had been shunning from responding to the students' requests and insisted that AVA students had to move from Kai Tak Campus to CVA Building, by phrases. She said the HKBU Administration saw co-renting Kai Tak Campus with HKADC a buffer solution for full-scale relocation. The Concern Group had written to Government Property Agency, Home Affairs Bureau, and to Carrie Lam, the then Secretary for Development Bureau and current Chief Secretary for Administration. None of these parties had responded.⁷

2012/08

- **On 8 August**

A Government spokesperson said that from 1 September, Kai Tak Campus would be allocated to the Education Bureau, who would rent the Campus to HKBU at \$50,000 per month. The Education Bureau would also consult the University Grants Committee to seek advice on the long-term deployment direction of this historical building. Cheung King-wai, Chairman of HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group, expressed to *Apple Daily* that while the Education Bureau had renewed the tenancy with HKBU, the HKBU Administration was yet to confirm whether AVA would occupy the entire campus. Future usage of this Officer's Mess would be determined through a tender process. Cheung wondered whether the future usage of the campus would be regarded as a form of subsidy, resulting in a decrease of grant amount available from the University Grant Committee.

Hong Kong Economic Journal reported that on 11 July, the Concern Group wrote to UNESCO to express concern on the direction of development of Kai Tak campus. On 1 August, UNESCO replied in writing that "(it) understood that the relocation threat of the Campus; (that) the relocation was against the intention expressed by the students to the university administration; (that) UNESCO felt sorry for the potential destroy to a recognised revitalisation project." However UNESCO was not in any position to step into the tenancy arrangement between the Government and the University Administration. The Awards were established only for the purpose of recognition and encouragement.⁸

- **On 12 August**

HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group organised "Arts saves arts" mid-summer auction. Artworks from 79 HKBU academic staff, students, and local artists were auctioned. HK\$686,260⁹ was raised. The entire amount would be incorporated in a trust fund. The amount would fund the resources required for long-term concern for the development of Kai Tak Campus.¹⁰

- ¹ News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A23, 2 May 2012
News coverage, *The Sun Daily* A11, 2 May 2013
- ² News coverage, *Ming Pao Daily* A14, 23 June 2012
- ³ “Recommendations ignored – from HK’s visual arts policy research to HKBU AVA campus in a historic building”, *Ming Pao Daily* P04, 26 June 2012
- ⁴ “Historical building turns the belongings of administrators”, *Hong Kong Economic Times* C08, 9 July 2012
- ⁵ “Historical building turns the belongings of administrators”, *Hong Kong Economic Times* C08, 9 July 2012
- ⁶ “Kai Tak Campus tenancy arrangement temporarily settled, AVA auction will take place as scheduled”, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* C03, 9 August 2012
- ⁷ News coverage, *Ming Pao Daily* A16, 26 July 2012
- ⁸ “Kai Tak Campus tenancy arrangement temporarily settled, AVA auction will take place as scheduled”, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* C03, 9 Aug 2012
News coverage, *Apple Daily* A11, 9 August 2012
News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A04, 9 August 2012
News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Times* A18, 9 August 2012
News coverage, *Tai Kung Pao* A08, 9 August 2012
- ⁹ Figure as reported by the press. The fund-raising total reported by HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group was \$683,550
- ¹⁰ News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* F01, 13 August 2012
HKBU AVA Campus Development Concern Group Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/%E6%B5%B8%E5%A4%A7%E8%A6%96%E8%97%9D%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92%E7%99%BC%E5%B1%95%E9%97%9C%E6%B3%A8%E7%B5%84-HKBU-AVA-Campus-Development-Concern-Group/199082436873724>