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## University 'chainsaw' moves on

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By [Chris Barton](#)

She has been described as a change agent, "the queen", autocratic, charming, extremely smart, efficient, ruthless, doing great things for the faculty, and a chainsaw.

So when news of Sharman Pretty's departure spread around Auckland University a week ago, it wasn't surprising that some were celebrating. One wag emailed the news to colleagues with YouTube links to Handel's *Hallelujah* and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*.

Professor Pretty departs her role as dean of the oddly named National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries (NICAI) to head a new faculty at Melbourne University created by the merger of Melbourne's music faculty with the Victorian College of the Arts.

She is no stranger to mergers. At the new NICAI faculty, she oversaw the consolidation of the schools of Architecture, Creative and Performing Arts, Fine Arts and Music, and the Department of Planning.

Beginning in 2004, her tenure was not without controversy, the most public in August 2007 when top Ivy League Professor Peggy Deamer resigned as head of the School of Architecture after only six months in the job.

Professor Deamer, who was assistant dean at Yale University's School of Architecture, cited a deep "misalignment" of views between her and faculty management as the reason for her premature departure.

In a series of letters to the *Herald*, university staff talked about a "climate of fear" at the school, disillusionment and "micromanagement" by the faculty.

Architecture students organised protests and president of the New Zealand Institute of Architects Ian Athfield and chairman of the Auckland branch Pete Bossley wrote to the vice-chancellor, Stuart McCutcheon, to voice their concerns.

For many, Professor Pretty's reign was the epitome of managerialism at the expense of traditional university values of collegiality and education for its own sake.

But as with the other controversies she faced – the restructuring of the Elam School of Fine Arts, the closing of the School of Creative and Performing Arts, unjustified dismissals at the School of Music, and the merger of Architecture and Town Planning – with the vice-chancellor's support she showed a steel will and ability to ride through anything.

In his letter to staff advising of her departure, Professor McCutcheon wrote: "As the accomplished foundation dean of NICAI, Sharman has led the integration of our departments and disciplines in the creative arts and industries, and has placed NICAI on a sound financial base."

Professor Pretty declined an interview about her departure, as she did most requests for interviews by the *Herald* during her time as dean.

She leaves in the first week of March. Professor Jenny Dixon, head of the School of Architecture and Planning, will be acting dean.

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