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Job cuts add to woes at VCA

Miki Perkins
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THE restructure of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music will require a major reduction in academic and administrative staff over the next two years, according to a confidential business plan.

It confirms staff fears that more job losses will follow the recent axing of 12 casual positions and the suspension of some courses. The faculty is about to embark on major changes because of the need to "align" staff with a new curriculum and bring staff-student ratios in line with the rest of the university, its 2010 business plan says.

The plan shows that faculty dean Professor Sharman Pretty has asked the university for an extra \$2 million to help with the transition to the "Melbourne model", a broad undergraduate degree with specialisation at postgraduate level.

Almost \$370,000 is earmarked for consultant fees. Marketing and developing a new website will cost \$400,000.

The Victorian College of the Arts merged with Melbourne University's faculty of music in 2007. As it moves to the new model, the former college's six schools have been merged into three. The musical theatre course and a puppetry course have closed.

Critics, including former arts minister Race Mathews, actor Geoffrey Rush and drama alumnus Julia Zemiro, say the overhaul will mean practical training becomes too academic. In an ABC radio interview yesterday, Rush said: "Some people don't want to be academics. They want to be actors who can really act, or singers who can really sing."

Professor Pretty said job losses would depend on the outcome of 220 job cuts Melbourne University recently announced. About 100 voluntary redundancies have been offered university-wide. The projected deficit for the faculty is about \$1 million, which takes account of university subsidies of about \$16.7 million, Professor Pretty said. And the current ratio of 7.4 students to one teacher was unsustainable, with 12:1 a more realistic target.

Students say the specialised nature of VCAM courses means they will never draw large numbers. Drama student Tom Barton, 22, said his department was already operating on a "skeleton staff" and a meeting on Thursday about the changes drew more than 400 concerned VCAM students.

The budget document said that while the former music faculty had been engaged in developing the Melbourne model, the former VCA was lagging: "The VCA (Southbank) has made little progress towards coming to terms with the Melbourne model concepts or developing curriculum in accordance with those principles."

Film and television lecturer Ros Walker said she was shocked that rumours about job cuts had been confirmed. "It seems an awful lot to be spending on marketing and websites when they're cutting the people who have attracted students to the VCA," she said.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/job-cuts-add-to-woes-at-vca-20090807-ecyf.html>

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