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Brumby spurns calls for financial help to VCA

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THE State Government has rejected calls to provide a financial lifeline to the Victorian College of the Arts in the face of growing opposition to its merger with Melbourne University.

With a high-profile delegation of former arts ministers to meet the university's vice-chancellor Glyn Davis tomorrow to voice their concerns, Jeff Kennett has called for Premier John Brumby to step in.

"I know the Premier is committed to the arts, but I'm quite sure if his political epitaph was that the VCA was lost under his watch he would be a very disappointed politician," the former premier said. "Once something like this goes, it never comes back."

The VCA merged with Melbourne University's faculty of music in 2007, with debate now raging about how it will be incorporated into the university's new curriculum model.

But Mr Brumby knocked back the cash plea, saying VCA funding was a matter for the Commonwealth and it was the Howard government that had decided not to fund the college as an independent arts institution.

"As a consequence of that, you see NIDA [National Institute of Dramatic Art] is funded \$33,000 a student by the Federal Government," he said. "The Victorian College of the Arts, through Melbourne University, is funded \$9000, so there's a funding inequity."

A spokeswoman for Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard said the Commonwealth would take part in consultations with the VCA.

Under the merger, VCA courses as part of the new curriculum or Melbourne Model are likely to require areas of general study as part of a degree.

The Age understands Victorian Arts Minister Lynne Kosky met the dean of the VCA, Sharman Pretty, last week and sought an assurance that three-quarters of the college's new courses would be in specialist areas.

VCA graduate and production co-ordinator for the musical *Jersey Boys* Scott Dawkins said that the college was never meant to operate under a standard university.

"I have no beef with Melbourne University or the merger, but the college needs to stay the specialist elite institution that it is," he said.

"College graduates from the Melbourne Model will not be able to compete. If you're going to pay the same salary, pay the person who has studied more intensively." Mr Dawkins said arts in Melbourne revolved around the VCA, with 13

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college graduates working on *Jersey Boys* alone.

Melbourne University spokeswoman Christina Buckridge said that no decisions had been made on structures for the VCA courses.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/brumby-spurns-calls-for-financial-help-to-vca-20090826-ezrc.html>