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Australian National Academy of Music aligns with University of Melbourne

Michaela Boland | September 03, 2009

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THE Australian National Academy of Music is set to align itself more closely with the University of Melbourne, despite the Victorian College of the Arts being embroiled in an almighty fight for its independence from the same institution. "It's ironic, isn't it, but I can't be responsible for what's happening at the VCA," ANAM chairman Ian McRae says.

The Melbourne-based classical music school was slated for closure by Arts Minister Peter Garrett last year but received an 11th-hour reprieve after a well-orchestrated campaign. Funding of \$2.5 million to cover places for ANAM's 55 students has been secured for next year but the coin is conditional on the school fulfilling key criteria such as introducing accredited courses.

Other conservatoriums offer bachelor degrees, which can benefit musicians who want to work overseas, but ANAM has never offered them on the grounds that its focus is on musical performance.

"We will be exploring a Melbourne University masters degree," McRae says. "The one thing we don't want to lose is the focus on performance training."

ANAM wanted to avoid the administration that comes with offering academic degrees, general manager Nick Bailey says. "That's why we're looking at working with Melbourne University and other (conservatoriums) around the country," he says.

Staff, students and supporters of the VCA are protesting against the federal government's plan to merge it with Melbourne University. They say the merger will result in less practical training, fewer guest lectures by renowned musicians and a reduction in overall practical training.

But those in charge of ANAM are unperturbed. "ANAM is technically a subsidiary of the University of Melbourne anyway," McRae says.

Garrett also asked ANAM to build better relationships with the state symphony orchestras and overhaul its bursary scholarships. The stipends, which traditionally have gone to all students, are progressively being means-tested, according to Bailey.

ANAM is also under pressure to develop independent revenue streams from business and philanthropists and draw more students from across the country, at Garrett's request.

In Brisbane this week a three-person panel, due to visit all main capitals, began auditioning students for next year.

"We have done it previously but not as thoroughly," Bailey says.

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