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Union wants Victorian arts college dean to quit

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THE National Tertiary Education Union has called for the dean of Melbourne's troubled Victorian College of the Arts and Music to resign.

The union said the dean, Professor Sharman Pretty, had lost the confidence of staff and was unfit to lead the college as it struggled with funding shortfalls and threatened changes to the curriculum.

In an open letter to the college's staff and students, the union will today call for Professor Pretty to stand down.

"This request is not done lightly, but is a result of your continued refusal to genuinely listen to the many concerns raised by staff and students of VCAM, and the wider arts community," says the letter, which is signed by Matthew McGowan, the union's division secretary.

"Now more than ever, VCAM needs a faculty leader who is conciliatory and unifying ... I hope you see the greater good for the Faculty, and do the honourable thing by stepping down as dean."

The University of Melbourne, which merged with the VCAM in 2007, last night expressed disappointment that the union had "sent a letter about a staff member's employment to the media before it had been received by the intended recipient".

Professor Pretty said in a statement last night: "I cannot respond to a letter I have not seen."

The SAVE VCA group supported the union's call for Professor Pretty's resignation, but said that her departure was not necessarily a solution to the college's problems.

"Getting rid of Sharman Pretty doesn't mean that the university won't just install a Sharman Pretty Mark II, and it certainly doesn't address the fact that this merger has gone terribly wrong, and the inaction of the state and federal governments in the wake of this mess is astounding," said SAVE VCA spokesman Scott Dawkins.

The resignation call comes two weeks after the release of Ziggy Switkowski's review of the VCAM, which was commissioned by the University of Melbourne. The review warned that the college faced a budget deficit of at least \$6 million a year and would need extra government funding. The Switkowski review also affirmed the college's training - thus flying in the face of comments made by Professor Pretty last year.

The university will respond to the Switkowski report in three months and "for the NTEU to act in this way in the middle of the university's deliberations was not at all helpful", a spokeswoman said last night.

But the union is concerned that changes are being made to the VCAM's curriculum contrary to the review's recommendations, particularly in the school of film and television.

"In the past, film and television students were each required to produce a film. Now, budgetary restraints mean that one film will be produced between two students," Mr McGowan said.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/union-wants-victorian-arts-college-dean-to-quit-20100526-we7x.html>