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VCAM Dean resigns

[Fri 23/07/2010 03:12:11]

By Emma Brown

The Dean of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music, Sharman Pretty, resigned yesterday in the midst of protests against budget, staff and course cuts since Melbourne University merged with the College three years ago.

Pretty's resignation coincided with the University's release of its official response to the Switkowski review of the faculty.

In an announcement by acting Vice Chancellor Professor John Dewar, he stated that the University would establish a curriculum review to be delivered at the end of the year that will undertake most of the Switkowski Review's recommendations.

Save VCA campaigner and college alumni Scott Dawkins said he welcomed the resignation although he and his fellow campaigners - nearly 14000 Save VCA members - are not popping champagne corks yet.

"The resignation of the Dean is good news but it's not a silver bullet, she was acting on behalf of the university," he said.

"New leadership is good but only if there is fresh thinking which is not apparent so far from the review as the economic rationalism language is still there."

The university's response titled *The future of visual and performing arts at the University of Melbourne* recommended:

- The 'Melbourne Model' proposal, where VCA students would undertake a quarter of their subjects in another area, has been suspended
- VCAM will be split into VCA and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music with two new director positions created for both departments
- Exclusively practice-based Associate Diploma and Graduate Diploma degree programs will be considered
- Studio-practice to remain central to tuition and that talent-based entry be reaffirmed as recommended by the review.

In a statement from Dewar, he said Pretty's resignation was part of the new direction for the VCAM.

"The University's response has clarified that the future directions of the faculty, and hence the role of Dean within that context, will be significantly different to that which Professor Pretty was appointed. As a result Professor Pretty has decided to step down, as such a different role is not one that she would be interested to pursue."

Speaking on ABC radio 774 to Jon Faine this morning, Dewar said that the University is facing a challenge to uphold the recommendations and be financially sustainable.

"We do accept the recommendations of the Switkowski review but at the same time in reviewing curriculum we have to have a very firm eye on financial sustainability."

"We think we can do both: preserve studio teaching on the one hand while ensuring the long term financial sustainability with the delivery of curriculum."

Dawkins said that since the VCA joined Melbourne University there have been huge staff and course cuts which have continued.

"We lost 8 per cent of the single staff body since 2009."

He said that the cutting of course strands, visual effects and documentary, as well as music theatre and puppetry, has been a major sore point.

The Save VCA group would ideally like to see the education institution be returned to an independent one or to only be affiliated rather than merged with Melbourne University.

"We want VCAM to be a stand alone institution like NIDA or AFTRS in Sydney," Dawkins said.

Victorian Premier John Brumby and Education Employment and Workplace Relations Minister Simon Crean will soon deliver a funding announcement regarding VCAM's future.



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Victorian Premier John Brumby spoke at the Melbourne International Film Festival last night about the future of the institution.

"The VCA plays a significant role in our arts industry and our government is keen to ensure that a high level of studio-based training is maintained and enhanced in the future," he said.

Mr Crean said in a statement that the strong community interest and concern in the future of the college represents the institutions' importance and its unique specialised teaching model.

"I am glad that the University of Melbourne has taken a sensible approach in its response and has suspended introduction of the Melbourne Model for the VCA, pending the curriculum review, protecting the central nature of studio practice and talent-based entry," Mr Crean said.

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Did VCAM Dean Sharman Pretty do the right thing by resigning?

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No



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