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VCA chief quits amid overhaul

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SHARMAN PRETTY, the controversial dean of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music has resigned amid an overhaul of the troubled college.

Last night the University of Melbourne released its response to the Ziggy Switkowski-chaired review of the college, which has been struggling since its merger with the university in 2007 and needs at least an extra \$6 million a year to survive.

The university has adopted many of the recommendations of the Switkowski review, which was implicitly critical of the direction Professor Pretty had taken at the college.

As a result Professor Pretty has decided to step down, as the role of dean will be significantly altered from the one to which she was appointed.

A statement from the university released last night said Professor Pretty was not interested in pursuing this new role.

The resignation was cautiously welcomed by the SAVE VCA group, which has been campaigning for the college to be separated from the university, and for it to be spared the introduction of the so-called "Melbourne Model" for students. "Today is a start to a win," said the group's Scott Dawkins.

"It's good that we will have fresh leadership, but we are still a faculty of the university and we are still seriously lacking in federal funds.

"Now our main focus is to pressure the Federal Government to fund the VCA as the centre of national importance that it is," Mr Dawkins said.

As recommended by the Switkowski review, the VCAM will remain a single faculty under the auspices of the university. However, it will be split into two parts — the Victorian College of the Arts at Southbank, and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, across the two campuses of Parkville and Southbank. Each part will be headed by a director, who will report to the new Dean.

The university has also suspended the proposed introduction of the Melbourne Model for the visual and performing arts disciplines based at the Southbank campus, pending further assessment.

The long-running saga of the VCAM's future took another dramatic turn last night when Premier John Brumby declared at the launch of the Melbourne International Film Festival that his government would "not rest" until a solution was found for the perilously under-funded college.

Mr Brumby called the VCA one of the state's great institutions, and seemed to hint that he was on the way to brokering a deal for more federal funding.

"We are having constructive conversations with the Commonwealth on the future of the VCA and I am determined to deliver a solution for a sustainable, vibrant and appropriately resourced VCA into the future," he said, to scattered applause.

"I hope to have more to say on this in the near future"

According to the Switkowski review, the VCA requires at least an extra \$6 million a year to pay for its courses — money state Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu has already vowed to provide if he is elected in November.

Many in the arts community have rallied to have the VCA's independence reinstated and to stop the introduction of the Melbourne Model.

Among the high-profile campaigners for the college have been actor Geoffrey Rush, college graduate and animator Adam Elliot and of former arts ministers including Mary Delahunty and Jeff Kennett.

Mr Brumby also said last night that the value of film and television production in Victoria in 2009-10 was \$233 million, the highest level on record.

For the text of the university's response to the inquiry, go to unimelb.edu.au/vcam-discussion/.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/vca-chief-quits-amid-overhaul-20100723-10niw.html>