

The Australian

Melbourne drops its model for arts school

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THE University of Melbourne has bowed to opposition from the arts community, students and staff by suspending plans to introduce the Melbourne Model at the Victorian College of the Arts and reversing its decision to merge it with music.

Joint faculty dean Sharman Pretty, who had been appointed to implement the merger and the Melbourne Model in a strategy partly aimed at cutting costs, is paying the price of the about-face and has resigned just 16 months into her appointment.

Professor Pretty had become a divisive figure in what has been a bruising tussle between a university seeking to rein in a \$6 million deficit at the faculty and advocates of the VCA and its expensive, practically-focused, teaching.

In May the National Tertiary Education Union had called on Professor Pretty to resign. The university said it was her own decision to leave.

It is the second time Melbourne has been caught out by recent opposition after the Melbourne Business School last year voted down a merger with the university.

In a victory for the SaveVCA campaigners, Melbourne said that studio practice will remain central to tuition and that it will seek to make savings elsewhere in the curriculum.

"We have formed the view that in practice-based disciplines . . . there may be factors that are unique to those disciplines that we hadn't previously factored in," provost John Dewar told the HES. The university plans to complete a final review of the curriculum by the end of the year.

But making the VCA financially sustainable may depend on the Victorian state Labor government and its federal colleagues making good on signals last week that they are prepared to offer support. In comments ahead of imminent state and federal elections, Victoria's Arts Minister Peter Batchelor said he was in "constructive conversations" with federal Education Minister Simon Crean on how to better support the VCA.

Professor Dewar said the university has been lobbying the state government to secure capital funding for the VCA.

But SaveVCA remains wary of the university's plans. "The Melbourne Model is still hanging over their heads," spokesman Scott Dawkins said. The university hasn't wholly

ruled out introducing, or partially introducing, its model of broader undergraduate degrees combined with specialisation at postgraduate level. But it will consider offering practice-based diplomas. From next year Melbourne will also reduce the minimum breadth requirement of its undergraduate degrees across the university following concerns it was restricting student choice. Minimum breadth will now account for one-sixth of a degree, down from one-quarter, in line with the University of Western Australia's plans.

Professor Pretty has been temporarily replaced by deputy vice-chancellor of university affairs Warren Bebbington as acting dean. In what is seen as a win for the VCA, associate professor Su Baker has been appointed to the new position of director of the VCA. Professor Baker is the head of the school of art and has been at the VCA since 2000, before its integration with the university in 2007. Music school head Gary McPherson becomes director of music.

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