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Arts college may get TAFE stream

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THE state government will consider introducing a TAFE stream to the Victorian College of the Arts in order to tackle the institution's ongoing funding shortfall. And the college's parent, the University of Melbourne, will consider increasing the number of full-fee-paying foreign students and renting vacant space on the campus to commercial arts companies.

The TAFE proposal was flagged by Premier John Brumby yesterday as he announced, alongside Arts Minister Peter Batchelor and Labor candidate for the federal seat of Melbourne Cath Bowtell, a one-off grant of \$3 million to the beleaguered college.

One-third of that grant is earmarked for new equipment, and the other \$2 million for seed funding for a foundation trust, which would fund scholarships and new staff positions.

As reported in *The Age* yesterday, federal Labor has promised to match that seed funding, and to restore the \$5.1 million a year cut from the institution's budget under the Howard government in 2005, if re-elected.

Mr Brumby said Labor would "continue working with the VCA ... to ascertain whether, like the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts, expanding to offer a new series of VET (TAFE) courses could contribute to future sustainability".

Mr Batchelor added that if the University of Melbourne, of which the VCA is a faculty, was interested in pursuing the TAFE course option, "then that's perhaps a way the state government could further assist".

University places are funded by the federal government, and TAFE places are funded by the states.

The university has this week launched a curriculum review that will consider all aspects of the VCA and relations between the two institutions, which merged on January 1, 2007.

Despite the funding boost and federal Labor's pledge, the VCA faces an ongoing shortfall, according to the university.

A review into the VCA by former Telstra chief Ziggy Switkowski, tabled in May, identified an operating shortfall of between \$6 million and \$20 million a year.

University sources suggested this week that the shortfall last year was in fact about \$21 million, and this year and next is likely to be about \$18 million.

University of Melbourne vice-chancellor Glyn Davis has committed the university to an ongoing cross-subsidy of about \$5 million a year.

That, combined with federal Labor's pledge, amounts to \$10.1 million a year, which still leaves the college about \$8 million short.

The Greens and the state Liberal Party have promised to contribute \$6 million a year to the VCA.

Both proposals would still leave a shortfall of about \$7 million a year on current arrangements.

The Save VCA group claims it has identified \$9.8 million in rental and additional administrative costs that the college bears as a direct result of its merger with the university, and argues that the best outcome for the college is a

demerger, even at the cost of losing the \$5 million cross-subsidy.

The university is expected to consider a wide range of options for the college in its curriculum review.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/stage/arts-college-may-get-tafe-stream-20100809-11u3s.html>