

SAVE VCA

VICTORIAN COLLEGE
OF THE ARTS



Information for the Arts
& Cultural Tourism Industries



I went online and experimented with this - If you tweak the Australian Institute Of Sport mission statement and replace the acronym 'AIS' with VCA, and the words 'athlete' and 'sports' with artist and arts you get the following:-

"The VCA is Australia's premiere arts training institute, internationally acknowledged as a world's best practice model for high performance artist development....At the VCA our passion for art is inspired by our passion for life. Join the nation's elite artists in an environment that reflects Australia's commitment to art and our ongoing pursuit of excellence..you are sure to be inspired and discover the champion within."

Doesn't that sound fabulous?

Australia does it so beautifully and unashamedly and automatically with sport. The sense of team history, moments of play, the sly idiosyncrasies, that intriguing level of public engagement – the celebration and relish of virtuosity and skill ...

And I'm sure at the AIS the frequency of shot-putters equals that of puppeteers.

Geoffrey Rush
Former VCA Guest Director & Lecturer



CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	6
VCA	7
VCA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE	7
THE ILLUSION OF PROTECTION	8
THE MELBOURNE MODEL	9
CHANGE: VCE AND ENGLISH	10
CHANGE: VCA STRUCTURE AND BEGINNINGS OF MELBOURNE MODEL	11
CHANGE: NEW LEADERSHIP	12
CHANGE: 2009 FLASHPOINT	13
The Dean's VCA	13
Staff Cuts	14
Courses Cut	14
PUBLIC OUTCRY	14
THE 2010 BUSINESS PLAN	16
Change to Teaching Model and Curriculum:	16
Staff Cuts:	16
Finances:	16
Publicity:	16
SAVE VCA WEEK	20
THE PETITION	22
THE ARTS MINISTERS	23
THE INDUSTRY RESPONSE	25
RESPONSIBLE DIVISION MANAGEMENT	29
ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE VICTORIAN UPPER HOUSE MOTION	30
THE UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE	31
THE GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE	32
THE VICTORIAN OPPOSITION PARTIES PERSPECTIVES	33
MODELS OF ARTS EDUCATION FUNDING	34
OPTIONS	37
YOU	38
LIST OF CONTACTS	39
REFERENCES	40

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) is the only tertiary institution in Australia to teach all major art disciplines on one campus – an offering unmatched by even the Juilliard School (New York) or the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (London). Changes to VCA are having adverse effects on the arts industry in Victoria and Australia. The original vision of a world-class multi-disciplinary college is fast being lost, with student experience eroding and the College losing favour with prospective students.

In 2005 the Federal Government changed educational funding policy, effectively cutting \$5 million (35% of revenue) from VCA's budget. The University of Melbourne (UoM), already affiliated with VCA, was required to subsidise the shortfall from 2007. After unsuccessful attempts to secure independent Federal funding for the College through the arts ministry, it was mutually agreed to merge VCA with the University to create the Faculty of the VCA.

A Heads of Agreement to regulate the merger was negotiated and signed. It was intended to protect VCA's identity, distinctive method and practice of teaching (pedagogy) and financial structure. Based on the undertakings in that document, the Victorian State Government passed the *Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Act 2006*. Later, it was decided to merge the UoM Faculty of Music and the Faculty of the VCA, creating the Faculty of the VCA and Music (VCAM). All merger documentation sought to ensure VCA would continue to provide essential services to Australia's arts business.

In our view, becoming part of the University has had a dramatic affect on VCA including:

- The introduction of non-talent based entry requirements;
- The implementation of UoM funding structures including the rental system (which sees VCA paying rent for \$103 million worth of buildings and equipment it owned pre-2007);
- Staffing cuts, with 12 staff sacked this year (2009) and only 3% of VCA professional staff being left in "unchanged" positions in the proposed Responsible Division Management initiative;
- Major reductions in the employment of sessional (guest) teachers who bring their current industry experience into the school;
- The suspension of the Puppetry and Music Theatre programs;
- The introduction of the Melbourne Model.

Based on the US system, the Melbourne Model condensed 96 UoM undergraduate degrees into six 'New Generation' degrees, requiring students to spend 25% of their program studying subjects outside of their degree. Students are encouraged to complete a further two years of post-graduate study to specialise in their chosen field. VCAM Music will adopt UoM Music's New Generation degrees in two of its three music streams from next year, with all VCAM courses slated to be Melbourne-Model based by 2012. Publicly, UoM management suggest they are open to the rest of VCA electing not to move to the Melbourne Model, however all discussions with staff to date have been based on the Melbourne Model.

The Melbourne Model, as it is being applied in the Music School from 2010, is in our view, an uncomfortable fit for an institution whose success has been based on elite, intensive, specialised training. Given the new VCAM Dean Sharman Pretty's comments that VCA's current offerings provide "narrow little degree programs" (The Australian 05/06/09) and the leak of the 2010 VCAM Business Plan, which details plans to "shift the pedagogical approach," it is our view that VCA management are not necessarily keen to continue the current approach. This has significant implications for arts businesses, with future VCA graduates likely in our view to be less industry-ready.

The SAVE VCA campaign is supported by some of Australia's most well known artists including Noni Hazlehurst, Geoffrey Rush, Andrew Upton and Julia Zemiro. They, along with staff, students, alumni and industry, have been working to shed light on the negative impact that the changes at VCA will have upon graduates and Australia's arts economy. Major arts businesses including Jersey Boys the musical and the Creative Technology Company have publicly expressed concern the 'new' VCA will be unable to supply quality, local graduates of the required calibre. Talent will be lost interstate and overseas as prospective students apply to study at institutions offering more specialised courses.

Dramatically changing VCA courses could put the multi million-dollar Victorian arts industry at risk. To use the Film and Television School as an example, in the past four years approximately 52% of all drama and documentary productions in Victoria have been written, produced or directed by a VCA graduate. Film Victoria has calculated the value of these productions to be at least \$214 million. It is usually the writer, producer and director who determine the state where a project will be made. The high success rate of the Film and TV School, rated in the top ten in the world, has been attributed to the intense and practical pedagogy, where all students make at least one film each year and to the substantial interaction, through sessional staff, with the local industry.

The initial \$5 million subsidy which the University gave to VCA has become much larger, notionally sitting at \$18 million per year. A large portion of this is due to the University changing its funding structures since the merger including a requirement that rent be paid from each Faculty based on space used. VCA fares badly in this structure given that arts training requires studios and large rooms for music ensembles etc. Far from providing promised economies of scale, the administration costs of VCA are reportedly now higher under the UoM management.

SAVE VCA calls on the Federal Government to immediately re-instate the 2005 cut by the Howard Government of 35% of VCA's revenue.

SAVE VCA also calls on the UoM to reverse all curriculum change made to date, and freeze development of new funding, staffing and curriculum arrangements until there is a full, Government supported and *independent* review of these areas. This review should be informed by an economic impact study on the value of VCA to arts and cultural tourism business, and what is required of graduates by the industry.

It is our view that VCA is in danger *now* and quick and decisive action is required from by both Federal and State Governments. It is imperative that the voice of arts business is heard to protect the College's ability to contribute culturally and financially to Australia's arts industry.

INTRODUCTION

It has been an eventful year at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA).

A lot has happened. Some of it public, a lot of it private and great deal of it not fully explained.

This document is designed to give a complete account of the SAVE VCA campaign. It gives a history of how VCA has come to be perceived as under threat, the events of 2009 that made the College a staple news story, and an update of where the institution stands now. Most importantly, it gives an outline of what is on the SAVE VCA 'to do' list and how potential developments may affect the arts industry.

There has been a great deal of confusion regarding where VCA stands both now and into the future. In producing this document, we hope to collect the publicly available information into one place. Of course our 'truth' is only one version of events and all the views expressed in this document are our honest opinion on what is happening. Indeed we still encounter a great level of difficulty in getting detailed, timely information on the changes to VCA. We would encourage you to contact the University of Melbourne, VCAM Management, students, staff and alumni to form your own opinion.

Change is not necessarily bad. It is the view of SAVE VCA, and of many staff and students, that there is room for improving the curriculum at VCA and that curriculum reviews can be constructive. A funding review is certainly long overdue.

However, this year changes have been far from constructive, and we believe VCA now exists in a state of limbo where its reputation, ability to educate its students and contribute to the industry is under serious threat.

The SAVE VCA campaign is for you. The staff, students, alumni and industry who give their time freely are your colleagues, your future employees, your business partners and your customers. We believe the VCA is of national importance to our culture, our arts and tourism business and of course, to the current and future students' careers.

Thank you for giving us an Australian arts industry worth fighting for.



VCA

From its start in 1867 as the National Gallery of Victoria Art School, VCA has become one of Australia's most highly regarded educational institutions, providing a crucible for new talent, unwavering support to local industry and a breeding ground for fresh artistic endeavor.

The VCA was officially proclaimed in 1972, and over the next twenty-nine years the College grew to encompass a School of Art (1973), School of Music (1974), School of Drama (1975), School of Dance (1979), School of Film and Television (1992) and the School of Production (2001). Until earlier this year, VCA had the distinction of being one of the few arts colleges in the world to offer courses in all the major arts forms on one campus.

The VCA Secondary School was originally one of the Schools of VCA. Following an initiative of the State Government, it now operates autonomously but continues to share strong links with the Tertiary College, particularly in feeding talent to the VCA Dance and Music Schools.

The reputation of VCA has been built on thirty-six years of offering intensive, practical-based training in specialised areas of expertise, where students learn by *doing*. Whether you use graduate success or the fierce annual competition for course entry or the esteem the College enjoys in the industry as your yard stick, there is no doubt the VCA has a lot to be proud of and a lot to give Australia.

VCA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

In 1988 the Hawke Government created a unified system of higher education. This meant that, because it was relatively small at around 1,000 students, VCA could no longer receive direct Federal funding. As a result, VCA became an affiliate of the University of Melbourne (UoM). This affiliation grew in 1991 when UoM assumed responsibility for VCA academic programs. In practical terms, this meant UoM accredited VCA courses. The VCA and UoM affiliation enabled VCA to continue offering its unique breed of training whilst maintaining its independence.

However, in 2005 the Howard Federal Government introduced the "cluster" system of academic funding which left VCA facing a 35% cut in revenue – a devastating blow to an institution whose courses were, by nature of the practical training, expensive. The Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson instructed UoM to fund the shortfall (\$5.3m per year).

With the knowledge that repeated VCA attempts to obtain direct Federal funding through the Arts Ministry (as enjoyed by Sydney's *National Institute of Dramatic Arts* and *Australian Film Television and Radio School*) had failed, it was thought the best hope for long term sustainability was for VCA to fully integrate with UoM. The current Victorian Government, based on commitments contained in a Heads of Agreement document, passed the *Melbourne University (Victoria College of the Arts) Act 2006*. VCA became a Faculty of UoM on 1 January 2007. VCA then amalgamated with UoM's existing Faculty of Music to become the new Faculty of the VCA and Music (VCAM) in April 2009.

For simplicity, in this document the Victorian College of the Arts is generally referred to as VCA (not VCAM or the Faculty of VCAM).

THE ILLUSION OF PROTECTION

In an interview with *The Age* (03/09/09), the current Head of Performing Arts at VCA (appointed late 2008) and former Artistic Director of the Melbourne International Arts Festival, Kristy Edmunds, asked “I wonder where all of this activism was when all of these decisions were made years ago?” This activism, which Edmunds goes on to refer to as a “strange hysteria,” erupted in May of this year when, seemingly out of nowhere, staff, students, alumni, and industry raised the alarm that all was not well at VCA.

The apparent two-year delay between the 2007 amalgamation of VCA and UoM and the 2009 protest is in fact a misconception. Almost uniformly, all parties involved with VCA concede it was the 2005 actions of the Howard Government that left VCA in an untenable financial situation, and the resultant merger with UoM was certainly favoured over the decline or indeed loss of VCA. It was hoped (perhaps naively) that the long held and successful affiliate relationship would simply continue in a new form, and there was certainly no talk of changing the VCA’s training methods, availability of courses or teaching staff.

The Heads of Agreement signed by the two institutions upon merger was very specific that it would be ‘business as usual’ at VCA. The terms included:

- *bringing into the University the international reputation and distinctive pedagogy of the VCA;*
- *providing within the University a secure, certain and sustainable framework that will enable the VCA to expand and enhance its role as Australia’s pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education;*
- *the status, uniqueness and reputation of the VCA and its statutory objects, strategic purpose, vision and educational programs are to be recognised;*
- *the VCA is to retain its title and logo (pentagram representing the five senses intertwined) for the purposes of branding, publicity and marketing of the VCA as a distinct entity and its programs both in Australia and internationally;*
- *the associated knowledge and skills of its staff - one expectation of any integration is that the VCA will take a leading role within the University in the strategic directions for the development and provision of performing and visual arts training and education within the University and in their subsequent implementation;*
- *the principles and practice of the VCA’s talent-based entry policy for students are retained;*
- *as a faculty of the University, the VCA is able to continue to exercise high levels of autonomy over the conduct and future development of its educational programs [including] the VCA’s commitment to provide individual and small group tuition within an arts practice environment with an emphasis on context, performance, production and exhibition and with studio practice as its core;*
- *the VCA graduation ceremony and the joint University and VCA testamur be retained;*
- *one of the core objectives of any integration is to maintain and over time to strengthen the funding available for the VCA’s educational activities;*
- *in the fifth year of any integration, the Vice-Chancellor and the Director and Dean of the VCA are jointly to arrange for a review to determine whether it is feasible to align the VCA’s funding arrangements more closely with those applicable to other faculties, without compromise to the ongoing viability of the VCA or the funding of its educational programs;*
- *both parties acknowledge that the importance to the VCA that it maintains its existing close and integrated connections with the VCA Secondary School.*

(for the full Heads of Agreement visit savevca.org)

So in short, the view from 2006 was that the merger was progressing to plan, the long serving Dean Andrea Hull was still at the helm and, while staff were told the \$5 million subsidy would have to be dealt with by 2011, VCA looked comfortable to continue its high level training under the UoM mantle. “Activism” simply didn’t seem necessary at the time.

THE MELBOURNE MODEL

In the same year that VCA's funding was cut, precipitating the merger with UoM, the Vice Chancellor of UoM released a paper entitled 'Growing Esteem' which detailed a significant change to all UoM courses which in 2007 would come to be known as the Melbourne Model.

As a result of the introduction of the Melbourne Model in 2008, 96 UoM undergraduate degrees were abolished and replaced with six broad-brush degrees: arts, science, commerce, environments, music and biomedicine.

Students would complete one of the six "new generation" degrees, then undertake a graduate program, such as a doctorate or masters, in areas such as law, medicine, education, engineering or nursing (The Age 15/12/08). The move to the Melbourne Model was to be completed by 2011.

The UoM website states:

Melbourne's New Generation degrees are designed to give all students depth and breadth of learning. Depth is reflected in the expertise you gain by studying a core program in a major discipline. Breadth is a result of choosing additional subjects from outside your major area of study, to develop other kinds of expertise. Breadth studies are a feature of Melbourne's New Generation undergraduate degrees, making up at least 25 percent of your program.

The net affect is that students need to stay at University longer to achieve the same level of training in specific disciplines, although arguably obtain a broader education.

Critics say that the changes are largely motivated by the university's desire to raise additional funds rather than provide broader educational choices for students and that the broad nature of the undergraduate courses will mean inadequate training (The Age 21/05/07).

A year on from its introduction, the Melbourne Model remains in the news. "Internationally, the university slid 11 notches in the 2008 Times Higher Education-QS World University Ranking to 38, relinquishing its lead over the University of Sydney, which was placed 37th. On the Shanghai Jiao Tong University rankings - which the university considers the most rigorous ranking system - Melbourne is at No. 73 in the world and No. 6 in the Asia-Pacific region" (The Age 15/08/09). UoM returned to parity with Sydney at equal 36th place in the 2009 results recently released (<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/hybrid.asp?typeCode=438>).

The introduction of the Melbourne Model has happened at a financially unstable time. As The Age reported (15/08/09) "The global economic crisis has punched a \$191 million hole into the university's 2008 investment income, with 220 positions to be axed in a bid to save \$30 million this financial year. And many faculties - including medicine, economics and commerce, land and environment, and the Victorian College of the Arts and Music - now have to either restructure or tighten their belts."



CHANGE: VCE AND ENGLISH

One way VCA has managed to train students to an elite level has been to select students based on rigorous audition and interview processes, selecting new students on talent rather than on academic scores.

As soon as the merger was finalised, prospective VCA students faced a new requirement - to have completed their VCE (Victorian Year 12 or equivalent) with a minimum English score of 25, or 30 if the student studied English as a second language.

The only way around the new requirement was for the prospective student to sit a 'STAT' (Special Tertiary Admissions Test). To sit the test the applicant had to be aged 23 years or over and have had no qualifications in the past seven years. For the 2009 intake, all prospective VCA students who attempted the STAT failed, and did not gain entry regardless of their talent.

Prospective students aged 18 to 22 inclusive who did not have their VCE (and minimum English score) had no way of gaining entry into VCA unless they pursued further education first (e.g. a 2 year diploma at TAFE to gain a Certificate IV).

These new requirements marked a huge shift in the way students were admitted to VCA. Pre 2007 there were only two requirements (1) you had to be at least 18 years of age and (2) you had to have exceptional talent. Prior to 2007 it was perfectly possible for a talented Year 10 school leaver, who had worked for two years, to audition for VCA Drama and to end up the top of the class. Indeed prior to 2004 the VCA application form did not even ask prospective students what level of education they had achieved. Between 2004 and 2006, students who successfully gained entry to VCA via their audition were only asked about their level of education at enrollment.

A lack of academic qualifications should not make it difficult for talented Australian artists to get access to training. If a student has not achieved a Year 12 qualification that should be factored into their VCA education - not exclude them from it.

For the 2010 intake, VCA audition availability has been altered. While the Drama school has traditionally auditioned in all capital cities (The Age 10/11/07), this year, auditions will only be held in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. By comparison, the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) are auditioning for their Acting course in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide. The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) are holding auditions for their Acting course in Sydney, Melbourne, Darwin, Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Hobart. The reduction of the scope of the auditioning process denies VCA access to the full Australian talent pool.

CHANGE: VCA STRUCTURE AND BEGINNINGS OF MELBOURNE MODEL

In an email to all VCA students on 18 April 2007, the then VCA Dean Andrea Hull confirmed that there was discussion of moving VCA to the Melbourne Model, however with some fairly strong conditions:

The VCA is not joining the Melbourne Model in 2008 but is in the process of determining, in consultation with the University, whether and how it might do so in 2009. No final decisions have been made. Whatever the decision is finally, the Victorian College of the Arts will continue to offer and teach across all of its current disciplines beyond 2008.

It has at no stage been proposed that the VCA would abolish its specialist courses in Art, Dance, Drama, Film and TV, Music or Production. What has been proposed is that these disciplines be offered as major streams under the umbrella title of a Bachelor of Fine Arts, the predominant degree title used internationally, especially in North America and Europe. The programs offered at the VCA are and will continue to be intensive studio and performance based.

While there has been discussion about a proposal for Film and TV to be offered only at postgraduate level, this discussion has not been finalised and all evidence is pointing to a likely decision which will see this retained as an undergraduate entry program.

The VCA has no intention to introduce a form of generalist degree or study. There may, however, be opportunities for students to undertake as part of their course subjects that interest them from other degrees across the University, for example, languages, education, physiology, technological design subjects etc. This would be an extension of the current common curriculum model and would involve a further 37.5 credit points or one-eighth of the undergraduate degree.

Again there was unease about the proposed changes, but the protection of course availability and “intensive studio and performance based” training seemed assured.

It wasn't until 22 April 2008 that UoM outlined major changes to VCA, with the six VCA schools - art, music, drama, dance, production, and film and television, to become three from 2009. VCA Music would adopt UoM Music's Melbourne Model program from 2010 (The Age 23/04/08).

The VCA now found itself with a condensed structure, a Melbourne Model Music degree and very strong signs the remaining degrees would also come into line with the Melbourne Model (even though to this day UoM still professes that the Melbourne Model is optional for VCA).

The Age revealed Andrea Hull had sent a frustrated email to staff alerting them the Music merger was precipitating far greater and unexpected “compromises” including UoM Music Board's attempt to have the VCA name and brand abolished (The Age 19/05/08).

In the same month Andrea Hull announced her retirement (The Age 28/05/08) effective March 2009.

Conversely, in July 2008 the VCA announced it would turn its highly successful Music Theatre 2-Year Foundation Program into a fully-fledged degree program. So at a time of great change, the VCA still seemed to be innovating and extending the diversity of its courses.

In November 2008 the Federal Arts Minister Peter Garrett attempted to expand the VCA Music and UoM Music merger by also including the Australian National Academy of Music to create the Australian Institute of Music Performance to be housed at the VCA site (The Age 25/11/08). Due to public pressure this was reversed.

CHANGE: NEW LEADERSHIP

In April 2009 Professor Sharman Pretty became the first UoM appointed Dean of VCA. Prior to coming to Melbourne, Professor Pretty had completed a tenure at the National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries (Auckland University) and before that at Sydney Conservatorium. In both institutions she was perceived to be an agent of change and steward of amalgamations and mergers.

Professor Pretty came to Melbourne after being the subject of a great deal of public comment in New Zealand:

She has been described as a change agent, "the queen", autocratic, charming, extremely smart, efficient, ruthless, doing great things for the faculty, and a chainsaw. (NZ Herald 22/12/08)

Professor Pretty's management style has been called into question before. In January another Pretty appointment, Eric Hollis, head of the university's music school, resigned. The music school has also had two reinstatements for unjustified dismissal. In 2005 Professor Pretty had staff complaints against her for bullying and was criticised for how she went about making staff redundant at the Elam School of Fine Arts. (NZ Weekend Herald 30/08/07)

During Dean Pretty's time at Auckland University she also closed the School of Creative and Performing Arts (NZ Herald 22/12/08).

The NZ Weekend Herald wrote on 22/09/07:

Not being able to talk is a common theme of the NICAI story. It happens as the result of an employment dispute settlement, or through staff feeling if they make any criticism of the university, it will be detrimental to their career. Staff and students the Herald spoke to variously describe the situation as a "climate of fear", a "climate of cynicism", a "climate of asphyxiation" and a "toxic environment".

It wasn't long into her tenure at VCA that Australian publication Crikey.com (07/08/09) reported an email Dean Pretty sent to a VCA senior staff member warning him it would be "unwise" to continue to raise his concerns about VCA with the media. The same Crikey.com article reported an instance of UoM Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis and Dean Pretty copying each other's public statements.

Cracks appearing in the foundation

Disgruntled staff and students are unhappy with the way the University of Auckland is running some of its departments. Chris Barton talks to the critics and the management.



PROFESSOR PEGGY PUGH, Dean of the Faculty of Education, who resigned from her position as head of Auckland University's architecture school after only two months, is the director of students and staff.

Disgruntled staff and students are unhappy with the way the University of Auckland is running some of its departments. Chris Barton talks to the critics and the management.

Disgruntled staff and students are unhappy with the way the University of Auckland is running some of its departments. Chris Barton talks to the critics and the management.

halt
this conversation is at an end

CHANGE: 2009 FLASHPOINT

There were three major events in early 2009 that caused quiet concern to erupt into public outrage:

The Dean's VCA

On 12 April 2009 The Age published an interview with Dean Pretty where she outlined new VCA policy. As Dean Pretty had not called all VCA staff together to discuss the future of the Faculty, it was by way of the media that the VCA community first heard absolute confirmation that:

- The Melbourne Model would be applied to the entire VCA by 2011, with two New Generation Degrees to be offered (Fine Arts and Music) and specialisation offered via post graduate study;
- The UoM would not continue the \$5m VCA subsidy past 2011;
- Up to \$11m was to be stripped from the budget (being the \$5m UoM annual subsidy plus funding the new \$6m annual rental payable to the UoM);
- The VCA name would be changed.

This edict was followed up two months later with another interview, this time with The Australian (05/06/09) where the Dean outlined:

- That staff to student ratios would decrease;
- That VCA's teaching model must change;
- What appeared to be a belief that the VCA had become complacent with budget control, suggesting "there hasn't been the financial discipline to stop and ask: is it necessary?"
- And that there was "a huge amount of wastage because things have been able to gather their own momentum and not be focused and strategic."

However it was six paragraphs in that interview with The Australian that would come to represent for the VCA community the huge ideological shift the Dean and the UoM appeared to have in store for VCA:

Pretty says the college was also prone to the fashion, dominant in higher education in the late 1980s and early '90s, for "boutique degrees, like master of production: puppetry, and master of production: stage design".

"People now tend to package them up ... and try and find a vessel through which people can collaborate," Pretty says.

Collaboration and "inter-practice" learning is at the core of Pretty's vision for the new VCAM. "I am astonished at how siloed this campus has been," she says. "It's siloed in its programs, it's siloed in its narrow little degree programs, and it's physically siloed to the point where there are people who have worked on this site for many years together who have only recently got to know each other."

Producing elite dancers that only become ballet dancers, or actors that only act, is no longer appropriate in Australia, she says.

"The only way people are learning to sustain a real career in the theatre, for example, is if they can write the play, act, make their own costume and sell the tickets.

"If they've got a whole package of skills there's a very good chance they will be able to find a niche and sustain themselves. The idea of someone being a specialist is a very old view."



Staff Cuts

One month into the new Dean's tenure, twelve casual professional staff lost their jobs, others were moved to different employment agreements and a hiring freeze was implemented (Crikey.com 08/05/09).

By August 2009 a leaked Business Plan would reveal these initial staff cuts were minimal compared to what was being planned.

Courses Cut

In early May 2009 rumours were circulating that the Puppetry program at VCA (the only one of its kind in the southern hemisphere) would be cut. The UoM refuted this claim via the media:

When queried about the future of puppetry at VCAM a representative of Professor Pretty relayed that "...no decisions have been made [and] any decisions in the University on the introduction or disestablishment of academic programs follows due process including consultation and approval by the University's Academic Board." (Crikey.com 08/05/09)

Thirteen days later The Age (21/05/09) broke the story that not only was Puppetry "suspended" but so was the brand new Music Theatre course, whose inaugural intake were only two months into their degree.

PUBLIC OUTCRY

These three events in tandem rallied staff and students to hold crisis meetings. These meetings were well reported by the media, and a public discussion emerged about whether the intention of the merger had been corrupted.

In The Age (21/05/09) The National Tertiary Education Union's Matthew McGowan stated:

"Students enroll in the VCA, not Melbourne University, but that identity is under threat," he says. "Promises given to the VCA about its future identity after the merger are being trashed."

The student body was even more vocal (VCA Student Union, Alison Hope in The Age 21/05/09):

"There is a huge amount of distrust with the administration," she says, referring to the introduction of the university's "Melbourne model", made up of three years of undergraduate study followed by a two-year post-graduate degree. "The fear is that no actor or dancer will be able to pay the post-grad fees. It's not as if they earn the equivalent of doctors or engineers"

"The university is avoiding language implying that it is slashing and burning courses. But as far as we are concerned, suspended means they will never come back. They are gutting the very nature of VCA courses."

The alumni of the Music Theatre Foundation course (the precursor the new Degree program) staged a sold out protest concert season entitled "Disappearing Act".

A VCA student disrupted his own graduation ceremony to bring attention to the College:

Filmmaker Robbie McEwen accepted his degree last week before declaring in front of vice-chancellor Glyn Davis and other university officials at the Melbourne Recital Centre that "people could thank the University of Melbourne for ripping the heart out of the VCA".

College lecturers who were there say the applause from students and their families was long and sustained, while Professor Davis appeared stunned. (The Age 23/09/09)

Students set up an impromptu website savevca.org and a SAVE VCA Facebook. Online social networking would end up being a hallmark of the SAVE VCA campaign, which currently has near 13,000 members.

Another feature of the SAVE VCA campaign has been the body of successful (and famous) alumni who have used their profiles to draw attention to the link between elite training enabling career successes, resulting in graduates contributing to the arts industry. Other non-graduate, prominent industry supporters have also given their support to the SAVE VCA campaign.

Former VCA Guest Director Geoffrey Rush was interviewed on ABC774 by Jon Faine (07/08/09) and drew particular attention to whether the enforced “breadth” which is 25% of every Melbourne Model degree was appropriate to VCA:

If you play in a major orchestra anywhere in the world, you’ve got to be skilled – you can’t be too theoretical about it. If you’re going to be a dancer in a major company, you’ve got to really know how to dance, similarly with acting, it is elitist in the same way that we admire so much in our sports people.

I made the comment the other night based on this, at the Longford Awards [Rush was awarded the Australian Film Institute Outstanding Achievement Award], to say that when even the head of the VCAM is saying that elite training of artists is a very very old view, they must be also able to sell the tickets, make their own costumes, and perform, to me that’s starting education from a point of mediocrity.

Very quickly discussion became around the cost of the VCA changes to the arts economy:

One academic warns the changes risk turning VCA courses into “a porridge of creative arts” without any consultation with the staff. “The standard of arts in Victoria generally will suffer if there is any drop-off in standards at the VCA,” she says. “Where is the benefit in destroying a respected national institution?” (The Age 23/05/09)

Stuart McDonald, VCA Film & TV Graduate and director of Summer Heights High echoed these sentiments in confirming the importance of the VCA to industry:

“You learn through doing, you don’t learn through talking about it,” he said yesterday. “There is an ‘ecology’ of the arts in Melbourne, and it surrounds the VCA.” (The Age 01/08/09)

What was peculiar about the VCA story was that a great deal of information was coming to staff, students and industry via the media. The climate of fear at VCA and the lack of free flowing information was resulting in frequent leaks to journalists and it was a leaked Business Plan that would ignite a second phase of the SAVE VCA campaign.



Three performer Anne Wood (above left), talent agent Ian White, comedian and actor Julia Zemlin and director Stuart McDonald yesterday, and (below) a performance by musical theatre alumni to protest against changes at the Victorian College of the Arts.

VCA alumni fuming over college changes

By MIKI PERKINS
PERKINS@THEAGE.COM.AU

WHEN comedian, actor and filmmaker Ian White announced last year that he was leaving his job at the Victorian College of the Arts to go to work for a major theatre company, it was a sign that the college's future was uncertain.

The young Sydneyer liked the collegial atmosphere and the lecturers' "no bullshit" approach. "From day one you were straight in there and leaving the craft by doing it."

But 15 years later Zemlin and other prominent VCA alumni — including Summer Heights High director Stuart McDonald, musical theatre performer Anne Wood and talent agent Ian White — are fuming about changes ahead at their alma mater.

Following its merger with Melbourne University's Faculty of Music — the college is now slowly changing the university's so-called Melbourne model, a broad undergraduate degree with program specialisation.

Ahead of the month's graduation in 2011, the college's six schools have been merged into a single 12 casual support staff have been lost and staff face more job cuts.

The inaugural musical theatre course has been axed a year after it opened and purports to have also closed. Curriculum plans seen by *The Age* show the changes will reduce from 16 weeks to 12 next year.

Zemlin and the others lament warn that students will not get enough practical experience to be employable in a cut-throat industry.

"It will no longer be able to compete with nationally recognised institutions such as Sydney's NIDA and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts," they say.

McDonald believes the institution has a tradition of creative freedom, nurturing out directors like Andrew Dominik, Stephen and Sarah Swan (My

farther job cuts, university communications manager Christian Backidge said the axing of 220 university-wide positions — announced earlier this week — was the only option planned. VCAM would continue to play a significant role, she said.

Staff say the university has underestimated the depth of community concern about the changes. A former arts minister, Sue Mathews, has called on the state and federal governments to intervene and musical theatre alumni put on a tongue-in-cheek concert — *Disappearing Act* — to protest against the changes.

Zemlin warns that reducing seasonal teachers will send links to the arts industry into jeopardy — jobs, White, who supports performance for music like Wood and Jesse Jays is appalled. The removal of theatre course has been supported. Agents demand a level of practical experience, he said. If the VCA graduates didn't have this, talent scouts would look elsewhere.

complementary links — opera theatres do musical theatre, Melbourne graduates go into film.

Melbourne University argues that the college is in debt and a change to the curriculum in 20 years essential. There will continue to be a wide variety of opportunities for practical training, it says.

Asked if there would be

THE 2010 BUSINESS PLAN

On August 8, 2009 The Age broke the story that an apparently confidential VCAM Business Plan had been leaked. It apparently detailed changes to VCA that far exceeded the public rhetoric of UoM. The full Business Plan was soon leaked to the public, and as result, were laid bare for all to see. These included:

Change to Teaching Model and Curriculum:

- *To ensure a consistent “university-style” education underpinned by the principles of research-led learning and teaching.* (Extract from Page 3 of 15)
- *To shift the pedagogical approach, particularly at Southbank, from that of “apprenticeship/certification/entitlement” to an education model of “discovery/ownership/accountability.”* (Extract from Page 3 of 15)
- *To move to a less intensive teaching delivery model that aligns to the University academic calendar.* (Extract from Page 4 of 15)
- *VCAM plans to fully integrate into the Melbourne Model by 2011.* (Extract from Page 5 of 15)
- *To expedite the integration of the two existing Bachelor programs and also to streamline the teach-out process, the 2010 intake to the Bachelor of Music Performance (Southbank) in the repertoire and composition streams will be suspended and the intake moved to the NG1 Bachelor of Music.* (Extract from Page 4 of 15)

Staff Cuts:

- *The current student to academic staff ratio (of 7.4 students to 1 academic staff member) is not sustainable. A more sustainable student to academic staff ratio is 12 to 1 which is similar to other intensively delivered programs at the University e.g. Veterinary Science SSR is 12:1 and MDHS SSR is 12.6 to 1 and to comparative sector norms.* (Extract from Page 4 of 15)
- *Analysis and modeling of projected salary saving targets for academic staff to enable achievement of a student staff ratio of 12:1 over 3 years and communication of the savings targets to be achieved to Faculty Executive.* (Extract from Page 4 of 15)
- *The Faculty is about to embark on a major restructure which will affect both its academic and professional staff. This is required for a mix of reasons including the amalgamation, the need to align staff resources more appropriately to the revised curriculum and to bring staff-student ratios closer to University and other benchmarks. This restructure requires a major reduction in both academic and professional staff numbers between 2009 and 2011.* (Extract from Page 7-8 of 15)

Finances:

- *A review of the University Rental and Property charging model and the increasing costs associated with these charges (estimated at \$9.6m in 2010 – an increase of 8% between 2009 and 2010 and increasing to 27% of all Direct Operating Expenditure in 2010). VCAM has the fourth highest rental bill of all Faculties (equivalent to E&C) with rental rates allocated based on location (i.e. St Kilda Road) rather than quality of teaching accommodation.* (Extract from Page 10 of 15)

Publicity:

- *Management of the messages and communication to all VCAM stakeholders of reasons for and impact of staff restructuring, the benefits of aligning with the Melbourne Model and the opportunities for the new Faculty.* (Extract from Page 10 of 15)

It was (and remains) our view that extensive changes to all facets of VCA's operations were being decided without any kind of consultation with those most affected.

On top of cutting entire programs (Music Theatre and Puppetry), it appeared that the Melbourne Model had become a foregone conclusion with an implementation deadline of 2011. More valuable staff would be lost and the mounting subsidy being assigned to VCA, in the form of UoM rental and property charges, would increase even further.

For us, VCA was in crisis.



SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09. Photographer – John Buckley.

HEADS OF AGREEMENT VS REALITY

After the Business Plan surfaced it had become (and remains) abundantly clear that the spirit of the Heads of Agreement in which the Victorian Government approved the VCA/UoM merger was simply being contravened. Indeed even the original intention of the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Act 2006 had been apparently ignored:

*A person who, immediately before 1 January 2007, was entitled to enrol as a student of the College in a course other than an award course is entitled to apply for enrolment as a student of the University in a **course of study that is the same or substantially the same** as that in which the person was entitled to enrol at the College (Section 8, Point 2 – our bold).*

Acts taken outside the spirit of the Heads of Agreement are shown below:

Heads of Agreement	Reality
"bringing into the University the international reputation and distinctive pedagogy of the VCA"	The VCA name is gone, the branding is gone and the Business Plan clearly outlined a complete pedagogy shift. The VCA's reputation has already suffered to the point where other institutions are using it as a selling point for their own courses ("With the future of practical based training uncertain at the world renowned Victorian College of the Arts, Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) is embarking on a new acting course which is based on practical training, being offered at its well equipped Benalla campus" http://www.gotafe.vic.edu.au/news/leadStory.cfm?ID=743). SAVE VCA have been contacted on numerous occasions by VCAM staff, particularly from the music school, who are seeking employment elsewhere to distance themselves from the 'new' VCA.
"providing within the University a secure, certain and sustainable framework that will enable the VCA to expand and enhance its role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education"	VCA is facing incredible uncertainty over the availability of its courses, the security of its work force and its capacity to meet its financial commitments including increasing UoM rental and property costs.
"the status, uniqueness and reputation of the VCA and its statutory objects, strategic purpose, vision and educational programs are to be recognized"	One major reason that the VCA is unique is its provision of all major art forms on one campus. However, within a month of the new Dean arriving two streams (Puppetry and Music Theatre) were suspended. The vision of providing education for the full artistic spectrum for Australians has been disregarded, and the highly successful teaching model of intensive, practical training will be near impossible to translate to the Melbourne Model.
"the VCA is to retain its title and logo (pentagram representing the five senses intertwined) for the purposes of branding, publicity and marketing of the VCA as a distinct entity and its programs both in Australia and internationally"	The VCA logo was removed in April 2009. The new Dean has publicly sought to dismiss the VCA as an entity e.g. "the VCA no longer existed" (The Age 21/05/09). The Dean wants to completely rename the institution (The Age 12/04/09).

<p>“the associated knowledge and skills of its staff - one expectation of any integration is that the VCA will take a leading role within the University in the strategic directions for the development and provision of performing and visual arts training and education within the University and in their subsequent implementation.”</p>	<p>The knowledge and skills of VCA staff are not even being utilised within their own Faculty, with most staff having had little opportunity to give feedback on proposed curriculum changes. In terms of respecting the staff, the heads of the two suspended programs were not even consulted prior to the suspensions being announced.</p>
<p>“the principles and practice of the VCA’s talent-based entry policy for students are retained.”</p>	<p>Talent entry remains but only after VCE and English score requirements have been met. Access to talent through national auditions has been diminished due to restricting the number of cities in which auditions take place.</p>
<p>“as a faculty of the University, the VCA is able to continue to exercise high levels of autonomy over the conduct and future development of its educational programs [including] the VCA’s commitment to provide individual and small group tuition within an arts practice environment with an emphasis on context, performance, production and exhibition and with studio practice as its core.”</p>	<p>VCA has been given no curriculum autonomy, clearly evidenced by the implementation of UoM’s Melbourne Model in Music (with the rest of VCA likely to follow by 2012). At best, under the Melbourne Model, studio practice can only be 75% of any degree program. With the reduction of teaching terms (up to 25%) in order to come into line with the University calendar (Business Plan 2010) and the introduction of additional theoretical subjects, the practical component is reduced even further. With the Music School moving to Melbourne Model in 2010 the impact upon practical classes is obvious, with the practical subjects (Performance, Aural Studies, Ensemble and Applied Studies) reduced from 75 to 43.75 credit points when compared to 2009 levels. In addition, music students will have reduced options, for example a student will not be able to study orchestra <i>and</i> ensemble, but will have to choose between them.</p>
<p>“the VCA graduation ceremony and the joint University and VCA testamur be retained”</p>	<p>Removed in 2009.</p>
<p>“one of the core objectives of any integration is to maintain and over time to strengthen the funding available for the VCA’s educational activities”</p>	<p>UoM has put VCA in the untenable position of having to come up with an extra \$6m of rent per year (increasing next year) which has forced staff cuts that threaten the quality of teaching.</p>
<p>“in the fifth year of any integration, the Vice-Chancellor and the Director and Dean of the VCA are jointly to arrange for a review to determine whether it is feasible to align the VCA’s funding arrangements more closely with those applicable to other faculties, without compromise to the ongoing viability of the VCA or the funding of its educational programs.”</p>	<p>VCA’s funding arrangements have been aligned with other faculties from the <i>second</i> year through rent being charged to VCA plus higher administration costs.</p>
<p>“Both parties acknowledge that the importance to the VCA that it maintains its existing close and integrated connections with the VCA Secondary School.”</p>	<p>The shift away from practical teaching at VCA will make the College less attractive to VCASS students considering tertiary education, particularly when there are viable alternatives overseas (e.g. New Zealand has a strong dance education offering).</p>

SAVE VCA WEEK

By August, the original student SAVE VCA group had merged with a similar staff body. A SAVE VCA logo and new website was born, and the organisation began to attract active industry members. Most telling was the number of SAVE VCA volunteers that had not even been educated at the College, but were keen to defend the place of VCA in the arts.

The result of this new grouping was SAVE VCA WEEK – a mini arts Festival to allow the industry to protest in a truly unique and passionate way. SAVE VCA WEEK was launched on Sunday 16/08/09 by Noni Hazlehurst to coincide with VCA Open Day. In her speech to staff, students, prospective students and their parents, Ms Hazlehurst chose to draw attention to the importance of protecting practical based arts education in order for arts business to continue to be able to contribute to the Australian economy:

It's very difficult to gauge the economic value of the arts. It's very difficult to put a quantifiable figure on what it means to be a practitioner of the arts and the contribution that you make.

It's no coincidence that Hugh Jackman, who incidentally was trained in Music Theatre at WAAPA, where all music theatre aspirants have to go now, has been voted the person Australian's would most like to sell our country overseas. There is a distinct understanding of the contribution that people like Hugh and Cate [Blanchett] and Geoffrey [Rush] and all the people that have had formal training have made to the culture and reputation of this country here and overseas.

It's all very well saying actors need to be able to write their plays, make their costumes and sell the tickets to have a viable career. Do we tell our champion hurdlers, that they need to knit their own costumes, hire the sporting venue, mow the lawns, mark out the tracks and sell the tickets? I don't think so. There is something distinctly rotten about what is going on.... I can honestly tell you that in thirty-five years working in the industry not one thing that I learnt that wasn't practical has been of any use to me whatsoever.

The VCA is too big to let go.

Hazlehurst takes centre stage in protest against VCA changes

By FARRAH TOMAZIN

AS AN acclaimed actor who has been in the industry for 35 years, Noni Hazlehurst says she smells "something distinctly rotten" going on at the former Victorian College of the Arts.

She is not sure what the future holds for the college, which has merged with Melbourne University's faculty of music in a contentious move that has resulted in job losses and courses being scrapped.

But with even more changes afoot, the award-winning actor and former Play School presenter believes this could well be the latest example of what she regards as the "constant diminishing and devaluing" of the arts.

Hazlehurst appeared at the college's open day yesterday to throw her weight behind the "Save the VCA" campaign against Melbourne University's new curriculum structure, the Melbourne Model.

"If these changes... are actually going to advance the cause of arts in society, and if all the kids who want to study here are going to be better actors, better musicians, better dancers, better producers, better technicians — fantastic. But prove it," she told hundreds of students yesterday.

Following the creation of the university's Victorian College of the Arts and Music in 2007, six schools have merged into three, 12 casual positions have been axed and musical theatre and puppetry courses have been dropped. Now, a confidential business plan seen by *The Age* has confirmed fears of further job losses. It stresses the need for a major reduction in academic and administrative staff over the next two years.

Hazlehurst, whose eldest son had considered enrolling into the musical theatre course before it was scrapped, said that because of their specialised training, graduates of the VCA were as highly regarded as those from Sydney's National Institute of Dramatic Art, the Australian Film, Television and Radio

Reward best teachers: report

THE best teachers would be given healthy pay rises and shared between schools as part of a performance-based system, according to a government report.

The report has backed merit-based pay but not if it is linked exclusively to students' results. Instead, it says, teachers should be able to opt in to a performance-based system that offers higher wages in return for teaching in demanding schools, participating in training and being judged by a set of national benchmarks.

Minister for Education Julia Gillard said the report would be used to develop new pay arrangements for teachers.

Ms Gillard wants a national merit-based wage structure where teachers who raise students' performance or acquire new skills are rewarded with pay raises.

STEPHANIE PEATLING

School, and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

Like others who have criticised changes at the college — including actor Geoffrey Bath, former arts minister Rae Mathews and TV presenter and comedian Julia Zemiro — Hazlehurst fears that practical training will give way to a more academic curriculum.

But the university has defended its changes, handing out a flyer at the open day to "debunk the myths" about the future of the college.

It said that specialisation in dance, art, theatre, film, television, production or music would be key to the new curriculum and that subjects would continue to be taught "according to international best practice".

It said that staff would be involved in developing the curriculum when it was introduced in 2011.



Fired up: Noni Hazlehurst joins students protesting against Melbourne University's proposed curriculum changes at the VCA open day yesterday.

PICTURE: MELANIE FARTH ODH

SAVE VCA WEEK was able to garner a great deal of media attention chiefly thanks to the creativity of the VCA's students. Ironically it was these students, who were studying specialised degree programs which the Dean had suggested had "silosed" their learning, that were able to stage everything from a mass Romeo & Juliet balcony scene at Southern Cross Station to Music Theatre flash mobs to full silent symphonies and synchronized dance across the Yarra footbridge.

Before SAVE VCA WEEK had even finished, The Age (20/08/09) revealed that half of the VCA Advisory Board had resigned. In an interview on ABC774, when Dean Pretty was asked by presenter Jon Faine if the trio had quit because they didn't want to be associated with the changes, Professor Pretty replied: "That may well be the case." The members who resigned were Lynne Landy, Dr. Janine Kirk and Noel Turnbull.

However it was the culmination of SAVE VCA WEEK, a march from VCA to Parliament House, which attracted the most attention and exceeded all attendance hopes. Led by Geoffrey Rush and VCA Drama graduate Julia Zemiro, students, producers, directors, writers, and fellow students from NIDA, WAAPA and the Ballarat Arts Academy marched from VCA to Parliament House.

Upon reaching Parliament House, the rally was met by speakers including writer and producer John Michael Howson, former Victorian Arts Minister Race Matthews, Heidi Victoria MP (Liberals) and Sue Pennicuk MP (Greens).

University of Melbourne Vice-Chancellor Glyn Davis has a problem on his hands as unrest grows at the Victorian College of Arts... The University seems to have badly under-estimated the strength of feeling about the proposed changes to VCA. (Crikey.com 21/08/09)



THE PETITION

To coincide with SAVE VCA WEEK a petition was started, asking people to formally put their name on paper to support the retention and protection of VCA's charter to provide specialised, elite, intensive training. At the time of publishing this document, the petition had over 15,000 signatures and was due to be handed to Victorian Arts Minister Lynne Kosky on 04/11/09.



Hugo Weaving signing the SAVE VCA Petition 17/09/09

THE ARTS MINISTERS

Five days after SAVE VCA WEEK had finished, the VCA was front page news and dominating talk back radio due to an unprecedented event in Australian politics.

Every living former Victorian Arts Minister from both sides of politics signed a letter to the UoM Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis requesting a meeting to discuss their concerns that the merger was threatening VCA's role in the arts community.

The proposed changes to the VCA at Melbourne University were very different to what was first proposed by the merger, Mr [Jeff] Kennett said.

"The VCA is truly one of the jewels in the crown of the arts in Victoria and to have it in any way compromised would be a tragedy for the arts in this state and nationally," he [Race Mathews] said.

"The VCA has developed a unique approach to arts education and training in Victoria and it's one that is widely admired and envied throughout the country," Mr Mathews said.

"(It) should be a specialist training course with a hands-on emphasis and that doesn't necessarily exist within the university context." [Race Mathews] The Age (26/08/09)

The unprecedented display of bipartisan support was from Mr Mathews, Mr Kennett, his former parliamentary secretary for the arts Lorraine Elliott, Norman Lacy and Haddon Storey, together with former ALP arts ministers Mary Delahunty, Robert Fordham, Jim Kennan, Andrew McCutcheon, Evan Walker and Ian Cathie.



The Vice Chancellor agreed to the Minister's request for a meeting, which took place on Friday 28 August. On the same day UoM issued a statement confirming the meeting had occurred:

The University assured the former Ministers that the current funding levels provided by the University to VCAM will be maintained until at least the end of 2011, and that no substantive curriculum changes have been made to date.

The University also re-affirmed its commitment to studio-based teaching as the core element of the curriculum.

The Faculty is embarking on a process of curriculum development over the coming year and has confirmed that it will consult widely with stakeholders with the aim of ensuring the Faculty will be internationally-competitive and will offer the very best visual and performing arts education in the country.

To frame the stakeholder debate on curriculum development, the University of Melbourne plans to release a discussion paper before the end of 2009.

However on 9 August Race Mathews wrote a column in *The Age*, suggesting key agreements had been "omitted" from the UoM public statement:

Arising from the meeting of representatives of the former ministers with the university, it was my understanding that, as sought, there was agreement to the effect that a fully independent, transparent and "inclusive of independent and civic stakeholders" review would be undertaken of the VCA's curriculum and pedagogy, together with other matters, including its finances and funding requirements.

It would be open for the longest-serving and most recently retired former minister, Mary Delahunty, to accept appointment to the supervisory body for the review.

We sought assurance that no reduction of studio training, practice or teaching would occur in advance of the review having been completed.

Given that the University's media statement omitted specific reference to these undertakings, it's important that their acceptance by the university should now be confirmed.

To date no such independent review of curriculum and funding has been actioned by UoM.

A day after Race Mathews' statement, former VCA Advisory Board Member and former President of the Melbourne International Arts Festival, Noel Turnbull wrote in *The Age* (Letters to the Editor):

The Victorian College of the Arts crisis was caused by a Commonwealth government and needs to be solved by a Commonwealth government.

The former Victorian arts ministers' proposed independent review (The Age, 9/9) provides the basis for solving the problem. It ought to be supported by everyone concerned about the arts in Victoria and Australia. Such a review should investigate the funding required for the VCA to retain its position as a world-class institution; its funding compared with similar arts training schools; the best governance form; the VCA's role in Victoria's economic, social and artistic life; and how the curriculum needs to evolve.

The State Government needs to take a strong stand. State Arts Minister Lynne Kosky has said that she can fix it with a phone call. If so, she should make the call. The Commonwealth Government needs to state whether it supports Brendan Nelson's VCA policies or not. If it doesn't, it should reverse his policy.

It would also help if Melbourne University stopped treating the VCA as a PR problem to be spun for the media and stakeholders, and started engaging with the real issues in a meaningful way.

THE INDUSTRY RESPONSE

The severity of VCA's predicament had become abundantly clear. What started as a student protest, turning into a celebrity story, then to a political debate, has now become an industry topic of urgent concern.

Supply

Not many Australian arts businesses can afford to hire staff who are not industry ready. VCA, like its peers NIDA and WAAPA, has earned its reputation by producing graduates who can work straight away as they have been trained by industry professionals who have imparted their current, practical knowledge.

Local talent is most attractive for business as it negates the need to pay relocations or living-away-from-home allowances (per diems). Producers don't want to have to import their talent, and VCA has helped make Victorian television, film and theatre production cost viable.

Input

The VCA's strong history of using sessional (guest) teachers has allowed the industry to have a say in, and mould training methods at the College. When it comes time to hiring, industry know what VCA graduates have been taught and know they can trust the outcome.

VCA also allows easy access for new Australian works to get staged and work-shopped, for instance VCA Music Theatre staged Eddie Perfect's first musical *Up*.

Confidence

Melbourne is touted as Australia's arts capital, which is a position well earned by an aggressive arts tourism mandate from Government and the fact that Melbourne is home to some of Australia's biggest arts businesses such as Show Works, System Sound, Bytecraft and Scenic Studios. However this income is dependent on confidence that Victoria will remain supportive of the industry.

It is the opinion of many industry stakeholders that the UoM vision for VCA will simply not meet the abovementioned requirements of arts business. The apparent unwillingness to even keep industry informed about changes, such as VCA courses being cut, shows a lack of understanding of VCA's role in arts business and the real dollars that are at risk.

How can a Melbourne Model educated VCA Production Stage Manager who has had their degree reduced by 25% in teaching weeks and had the remaining 75% reduced by a further 25% for a breadth subject, have had enough training to call a multi-million dollar musical?

How can a VCA Drama graduate taught in larger classes, for shorter terms, with less industry practitioners compete at the same level as a NIDA graduate in an audition?

Why would a dancer choose to do a five-year degree when the average dancer's performing career is over by their early thirties?

Jersey Boys the musical was the first major arts production to speak out about the changes to VCA:

VCA graduate and production co-ordinator for the musical Jersey Boys Scott Dawkins said that the college was never meant to operate under a standard university.

"I have no beef with Melbourne University or the merger, but the college needs to stay the specialist elite institution that it is," he said.

"College graduates from the Melbourne Model will not be able to compete. If you're going to pay the same salary, pay the person who has studied more intensively." Mr Dawkins said arts in Melbourne revolved around the VCA, with 13 college graduates [and teachers] working on Jersey Boys alone. (The Age 27/08/09)



Members of the Jersey Boys cast and crew who graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts. PHOTO: WENDY WILSON

Brumby spurns calls for financial lifeline to arts college

By DAVID HOOD
SENIOR POLITICAL REPORTER
THE State Government has rejected calls to provide a financial lifeline to the Victorian College of the Arts in the face of growing opposition to its merger with Melbourne University.
With a high-profile delegation of former arts ministers to meet the university's vice-chancellor Gillian Triggs tomorrow to voice their concerns, Jeff Kennett has called for Premier John Brumby to step in.

"I know the Premier is committed to the arts, but I'm quite sure if his political epiphany was that the VCA was lost under his watch he would be a very disappointed politician," the former premier said. "Once something like this goes, it never comes back."
The VCA merged with Melbourne University's faculty of music in 2007, with debate raging about how it will be incorporated into the university's new curriculum model.
But Mr Brumby knocked back

the cash plea, saying VCA funding was a matter for the Commonwealth and it was the Howard government that had decided not to fund the college as an independent arts institution.
"As a consequence of that, you see NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art) is funded \$33,000 a student by the Federal Government," he said. "The Victorian College of the Arts, through Melbourne University, is funded \$9000, so there's a funding inequity."
A spokesperson for Federal

Education Minister Julia Gillard said the Commonwealth would take part in consultations with the VCA.
Under the merger, VCA courses as part of the new curriculum or Melbourne Model are likely to require areas of general study as part of a degree.
The Age understands Victorian Arts Minister Lynne Kosky met the dean of the VCA, Sharon Perry, last week and sought an assurance that three-quarters of the college's new courses would be in specialist areas.

VCA graduate and production co-ordinator for the musical Jersey Boys Scott Dawkins said that the college was never meant to operate under a standard university.
"I have no beef with Melbourne University or the merger, but the college needs to stay the specialist elite institution that it is," he said.
"College graduates from the Melbourne Model will not be able to compete. If you're going to pay the same salary, pay the person who has studied more

intensively," Mr Dawkins said arts in Melbourne revolved around the VCA, with 13 college graduates working on Jersey Boys alone.
Melbourne University spokeswoman Christina Buckridge said that no decisions had been made on structures for the VCA courses.
FOCUS
Culture can PAGE 15
COMMENT & DEBATE
Editorial PAGE 16

The Age 27/08/09 Page 3

Leading animatronics company The Creature Technology Company (CTC) who were the creators of the \$250m Walking with Dinosaurs worldwide success story and the forthcoming New York Radio City production of King Kong Live on Stage also publicly expressed concern that changes to VCA would affect their business:

Finding trained puppeteers and puppet makers is a pressing concern for Mr Tilders and CTC general manager John Barcham. Both say they are outraged and angered by the suspension of the puppetry course at the Victorian College of the Arts as part of its controversial merger with the University of Melbourne and have written to federal Arts Minister Peter Garrett in protest.

The company employs 32 full-time staff and has had 14 VCA graduates working in its puppet fabrication department. The company expects to employ 60 people on its King Kong project by next year.

But Mr Tilders said the company's future in Melbourne and Australia was "potentially capped" by the lack of talented creative staff it could draw on. "This is one of our biggest issues; we need people with the skills and practical experience, but also the sensitivity to this genre," Mr Tilders said.

He added that the company had recently entered an agreement with US film giant Dreamworks to develop an arena show based on its forthcoming film *How To Train Your Dragon*. CTC is also talking to Cirque du Soleil about future collaborations.

"Melbourne is in the running to become the world centre for animatronic design and puppetry but it won't happen if they remove the puppetry course," said Mr Barcham. "Those people [making the decision] wouldn't even know there's a new genre of entertainment coming out of Melbourne." (The Age 19/09/09)



The seven-metre-high King Kong being built by CTC at a workshop in West Melbourne. The finished creature will be controlled by 70 meters.

PICTURE: GUY SPENCER

High, wired and handsome, Kong rises in Melbourne

By RAYMOND GILL
CHIEF ARTS WRITER

KING Kong is planning to take Manhattan again, but this time he's plotting his assault from an anonymous workshop in West Melbourne.

Inside the headquarters of animatronics company The Creature Technology Company (CTC), a team of software designers, sculptors, puppet fabricators and mechanical engineers are constructing a "life-like" seven-metre-tall King Kong which, if all goes as planned, will be strutting the stage of New York's Radio City Music Hall in 2011 in a stage adaptation of the 1933 film.

King Kong Live on Stage promises to be far more lifelike than any film version of the beast because of the high-tech puppetry developed by

CTC, which is best known for its arena show *Walking with Dinosaurs*. Since its 2006 premiere in Sydney, that show, based on the BBC natural history series, has been seen by 8 million people.

Dinosaurs has clocked up \$250 million in worldwide ticket sales and proved a spectacular investment for CTC's owner, Gerry Ryan, the founder of Melbourne caravan company Jayco.

"But this is a huge leap from the dinosaurs because here King Kong is the key character who will have to command the stage and act alongside actors," said CTC creative director Steury Tilders, who has overseen the beast's construction since CTC was granted the adaptation rights by the estate of King Kong creator Merian C. Cooper early this year.

"When he scratches his nose, for instance, it will have to be done in one fluid, controlled motion where all the muscles up his arm will move at once."

The partially built King Kong is now a high-tech assemblage of steel, fiberglass, alloys and lycra-reinforced polyurethane. When modelling is finished by late next year, he will be controlled by 70 cigarette pack-sized motors. His face alone will conceal 40 of the motors to communicate his emotions as he is transported from Skull Island to Manhattan, where he finds love with a young blonde and a greaserish position on top of the Empire State Building.

King Kong Live on Stage will use up to five models of King Kong with each operated by three puppeteers using remote technology called a

"wooden rig" from backstage. Finding trained puppeteers and puppet makers is a pressing concern for Mr Tilders and CTC general manager John Barcham. Both say they are outraged and angered by the suspension of the puppetry course at the Victorian College of the Arts as part of its controversial merger with the University of Melbourne and have written to federal Arts Minister Peter Garrett in protest.

The company employs 32 full-time staff and has had 14 VCA graduates working in its puppet fabrication department. The company expects to employ 60 people on its King Kong project by next year.

But Mr Tilders said the company's future in Melbourne and Australia was "potentially capped" by the lack of talented creative staff

it could draw on. "This is one of our biggest issues; we need people with the skills and practical experience, but also the sensitivity to this genre," Mr Tilders said.

He added that the company had recently entered an agreement with US film giant Dreamworks to develop an arena show based on its forthcoming film *How To Train Your Dragon*. CTC is also talking to Cirque du Soleil about future collaborations.

"Melbourne is in the running to become the world centre for animatronic design and puppetry but it won't happen if they remove the puppetry course," said Mr Barcham. "Those people [making the decision] wouldn't even know there's a new genre of entertainment coming out of Melbourne."

The Age 19/09/09 Page 5

In September 2009 VCA Film and TV staff confirmed that in the past four years approximately 52% of all drama and documentary productions in Victoria have been written, produced or directed by a VCA alumnus. Film Victoria put the value of these productions at a minimum of \$214 million. Given it is usually the writer, producer, and director who determine the state where a project will be made, this represents a huge number of jobs dependent on VCA alumni creating projects. The high success rate of the Film and TV School, rated in the top ten in the world, has been attributed to the intense and practical pedagogy where all students make at least one film each year and to the substantial interaction, through sessional staff, with the local industry.

And it's not just art business concerned. Well-respected artists have also spoken out (taken from The Age 27/08/09):

The fact that a specialised training institution existed in Melbourne enabled me to stay in my own city and learn my craft. The teaching staff were connected to the film and TV industry and created opportunities for students to find work when they graduated - be it as cinematographers, directors or editors.

The danger of a university-focused approach that is more academic is that it has little relevance to the working life of a filmmaker.

Ana Kokkinos is a writer/director and VCA graduate. Her latest film is Blessed.

I was one of the first intake of students in the Drama School in 1978. I graduated when I was 24 and I have been in full-time work as a playwright/screenwriter ever since. I owe my career to the VCA. In fact, my three years at drama school were the most intense, exhilarating and empowering years of my life.

I was also a student of Melbourne University. I am a senior fellow in the Australian Centre. From the moment it was mooted that VCA become a faculty of the university I have been concerned. I could not see how the specialist training offered at VCA could fit within the academic requirements and funding imperatives of the university. In my 25 years of working in the theatre, I know that academic predisposition has no bearing on creative practice. Put simply, I have known actors who were brilliant thinkers and I've known actors who were really stupid. Intelligence bears no relation to an actor's capacity to be brilliant on stage. None.

Training as an actor has little to do with essays and exams, it has everything to do with a deep knowledge of body and soul, knowing how to inhabit the light on stage and how to transform into someone else. When I read regularly of the achievements of VCA graduates I am reminded of the great work that goes on there; and the distinctive and brilliant creative talents that have been trained there.

The university's media office says that entry will continue to be talent-based and that the VCA will remain a practice-based faculty. We must hold the university to this. Victoria cannot be a leader in cultural activity without the VCA.

Hannie Rayson is an award-winning playwright, whose works include Hotel Sorrento, Life After George and Inheritance.



RESPONSIBLE DIVISION MANAGEMENT

On 22 September 2009 the UoM issued its Responsible Division Management “Draft for Consultation” to all Faculties. The proposed VCA RDM process will substantially change the professional staff structure with 46% new positions, 51% being “refocussed” and 3% remaining unchanged. While UoM states that there has been adequate consultation time, in practice we believe that there has been minimum time to digest the new structure and to provide feedback.

There is great concern that many of VCA’s most valuable staff will opt to take redundancies in order to distance themselves from the new vision for the School. This is particularly apparent in Music, with SAVE VCA being contacted by a number of senior staff who are intending to take up positions at other institutions in Australia and abroad in 2010.

A National Tertiary Education Union run survey was completed by a sample of 44 VCAM Southbank staff attending a meeting on 14/10/09. The ballot revealed that 40% of staff present were making arrangements to leave the College within the next twelve months. While any one person is replaceable, if this statistic is true across the whole College, then it represents a huge talent drain in the teaching staff.

This leaves us with the confronting reality – if the State and Federal Government don’t act now, there will be a lot less of the VCA to save.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE VICTORIAN UPPER HOUSE MOTION

On the 12/09/09 the Victorian Liberals announced \$6m in extra funding for VCA should they win the November 2010 election. The Liberal threat of enforced demerger if the University continued to not meet the conditions of the Heads of Agreement was explosive.

For the first time, additional funding was being discussed, but more importantly, it was the first time UoM's accountability to Government was voiced.

The UoM was quick to respond, with Acting Vice Chancellor Susan Elliot writing "a fiery letter to state MPs warning them to butt out of the university's business" (The Age 15/09/09). The letter was sent to all MPs.

Current VCA student Drew Oettifer's letter to The Age was published the next day:

"Despite its best efforts to the contrary, the University remains a public institution that is ultimately answerable to the Victorian people. The objections to its proposed changes at the VCA are resounding and bipartisan. Rather than accept the wisdom of these assessments, however, the university continues to attack its critics.

If this is the way the university responds to criticism from members of Parliament, I shudder to think how it will respond to criticism during the "consultation" regarding the restructure to which it constantly refers".

The timing of the letter coincided with the Victorian Liberal Member for Eastern Metropolitan Region, Bruce Atkinson tabling a motion in the Victorian Upper House regarding the changes to VCA.

As tabled on 16/09/09, the motion reads:

That this House —

(1) expresses its concern about the proposed changes to the Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts curriculum and budget cuts by the University of Melbourne and calls on the Premier to make representations to the Vice-Chancellor and the University Council to ensure the continuation of the specialist performing arts degree courses and practical training under the Victorian College of the Arts;

(2) notes Melbourne's pre-eminent position in the performing arts and the substantial contribution of the musical theatre and other performing arts to the Victorian economy and recognises the significant role the Victorian College of the Arts has played in teaching performance skills and developing successful performers for Australian and international theatre, film, television and musical productions;

(3) further notes the support of former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett and other former Ministers of the Arts, including Mary Delahunty and Race Matthews, as well as the commitment of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Ted Baillieu, to the continuation of the specialist courses and function of the Victorian College of the Arts;

(4) notes that the University of Melbourne has limited and cut courses on offer through the Victorian College of the Arts and has abandoned various commitments made in agreements that led to the Parliament agreeing to the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Act 2006; and

(5) expresses its concern that the actions of the University of Melbourne, with limited consultation, have not been consistent with the assurance of the State Minister for Finance in the second reading debate of the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill in 2006 that the integration would "guarantee that the College's role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education can continue."

After four and half hours of debate, the motion was unanimously passed by all Members of the Upper House in attendance.

See savevca.org for the transcript of the debate.

THE UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

As previously mentioned, the VCA / UoM relationship was highly successful when the institutions were affiliates. The Howard Government put the UoM in the challenging position of having to take on the VCA as a Faculty and provide a \$5m annual subsidy (2007-2011).

However UoM's dealings with VCA post-merger (particularly this year) have been characterised by limited information flow, a failure to provide a vehicle for genuine consultation and given the tensions, a lack of willingness to involve more independent review procedures.

To date the University has expressed five key views on these concerns:

Timing of the protest

"I wonder where all of this activism was when all of these decisions were made years ago" (VCAM Head of Performing Arts Kristy Edmunds in The Age 03/09/09).

Timing of the merger

"But first let me be clear that the "highly controversial merger" with the University of Melbourne, and the "proposed changes", in which six schools "will be restructured into three" had already happened well before my arrival as Dean just four months ago." (VCAM Dean Sharman Pretty in The Age 27/08/09)

Timing of the new curriculum

"We have not yet developed our new curriculum" (VCAM Dean Sharman Pretty on ABC774 Mornings with Jon Faine).

Timing of consultation

"Any new curriculum requires an intensive period of consultation. This will likely occupy much of the next year at the Faculty. Curriculum review will involve meetings with external employers, VCAM graduates, staff and students, with no shortage of opportunities for stakeholders to contribute their views." (Vice Chancellor in an email to all UoM Alumni 31/08/09).

Provision of guarantees

"The Premier [John Brumby] says Arts Minister Lynne Kosky has taken a proposal to Melbourne University Vice-Chancellor Glyn Davis, that students should be able to do 75 per cent of their studies in the core area of their choice.

"So that means if you're studying dance, you do 75 per cent of your time in that. If you're doing film, you spend 75 percent of your time in that." (ABC News Online 27/08/09)

It has since become apparent a University guarantee of 75% specialised study does not necessarily equate to 75% practical study as there can be additional theoretical study that is still within the discipline. The VCAM Music School 2010 curriculum is a prime example of how the Melbourne Model provides 75% music study, but much less than that in actual practical training. When comparing the 2009 and 2010 course outlines, practical music subjects are reducing from 75 to 43.75 credit points (31.25%) from next year.

UoM communication has also included factual errors. For instance, in an email to the University Council on 27/08/09 Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis asserted:

"A Music Theatre course, previously approved only for two intakes, has issues with curriculum design beyond its first year, and financial challenges providing an intensive three-year degree offering. A further intake has been suspended pending investigation whether the course would be better offered at graduate level."

This information was mistaken – Music Theatre was never on a two-year trial and the curriculum had been fully approved by the UoM Curriculum Board. Whilst this error was admitted to SAVE VCA representatives, it was never retracted publicly. In fact this email to Council was partially reproduced, and sent to every UoM alumnus from every Faculty on 31/08/09. The mention of the two year trial of Music Theatre was dropped, but the assertion of "issues with curriculum design" remained. To date, no

other reason has been publicly detailed to explain why the popular Music Theatre course was suspended. This is despite the Music Theatre degree program running in the black (and budgeted to run in the black for the next three years) and having had over 370 applicants from across Australia in its first year.

Open and transparent information flow from UoM and VCAM Management remains a challenge. However, SAVE VCA remains committed to working with the UoM for VCA's future.

THE GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

Whilst both the Victorian and Federal Labor Governments have engaged with the SAVE VCA campaign, to date there is no consensus as to what should be done and who should do it:

Julia Gillard – Federal Education Minister

"The VCA is an important institution. We are prepared to work collaboratively with the State Government, with the VCA itself, with the University of Melbourne, on its future." (Julia Gillard on ABC TV Stateline 28/08/09).

"The VCA has been funded by the Australian Government as a higher education provider rather than a cultural institution....As an autonomous institution, the University of Melbourne is responsible for managing its internal affairs including the structure of its faculties and nature of its course offerings within broad funding profiles agreed with the Government." (02/10/09 Letter to the Victorian Film and Television Industry Working Party, sent by Rod Manns of the Higher Education Group on behalf of Ms Gillard)

Peter Garrett – Federal Arts Minister

"Education Minister Brendan Nelson's refusal to properly fund universities has forced the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) to announce a 25 per cent HECS hike that may cause serious damage to Australian arts and culture.

The HECS hike is terrible news for VCA students, many of whom will graduate with a HECS debt they may be not be able to re-pay.

VCA is a world-class institution that has trained generations of Australian artists with a proud tradition of merit-based entry.

The HECS hikes at VCA mean that many of Australia's future artists may be put off studying their field. This is a terrible blow for the Australian arts community which has been enriched over the years by VCA." (06/07/05 Media Release from when Mr Garrett was Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Reconciliation & the Arts <http://www.petergarrett.com.au/62.aspx>)

"The Australian Government funds a limited number of performing arts training organisations based on their capacity to be national centres of excellence in their respective field and on an identified need in the relevant arts sector. The VCA has been funded by the Australian Government as a higher education provider rather than a national performing arts training institution and accordingly is the portfolio responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion, the Hon Julia Gillard MP." (01/07/09 Letter to Alumnus, sent by Mark Taylor of Arts Development and Training on behalf of Mr Garrett).

"It's [VCA] not something that is specifically funded through me and I don't anticipate it being something that I'll be funding." (Peter Garrett on ABC Radio National 04/10/09).

John Brumby – Victorian Premier

"Mr Brumby knocked back the cash plea, saying VCA funding was a matter for the Commonwealth and it was the Howard government that had decided not to fund the college as an independent arts institution". (The Age 27/08/09)

Lynne Kosky – Victorian Minister for the Arts

“State Governments have never funded tertiary institutions. That is rightly the responsibility of the Federal Government in terms of the operating funding.” (Lynne Kosky on ABC TV Stateline 28/08/09).

“The Victorian College of the Arts should become a federally-funded institution to rival NIDA, according to Victorian Arts Minister Lynne Kosky.” (Sunday Herald Sun 11/10/09).

Gavin Jennings – Victorian Minister for Innovation

“It [a resolution] will involve the wit and wherewithal of the Victorian government trying to encourage the Commonwealth Government to face up to its share of responsibility and respond to a quite reasonable claim by many people from all parts of the debate in relation to the appropriate degree of financial support that the commonwealth should provide to the Victorian College of the Arts.” (Gavin Jennings as quoted in Hansard – VCAM Upper House Debate 16/09/09).

THE VICTORIAN OPPOSITION PARTIES PERSPECTIVES

Ted Baillieu – Victorian Opposition Leader, Shadow Arts Minister

“As it currently stands, we risk losing one of the most significant arts institutions in the nation and some of the best arts students and staff in Australia,” he writes.

“A Baillieu government would ensure that the shortfall of up to \$6 million currently preventing the college from fulfilling its purpose will be restored.

“Further, if Melbourne University is unable to adequately meet the requirements of the college ... a Baillieu government will move to return the VCA to its previous independent and autonomous status, ensuring that it is able to provide teaching and instruction in accordance with the practical requirements of a school of the arts.” (The Age 12/09/09)

Heidi Victoria – The Victorian Liberals, Member for Bayswater

“Melbourne has been the arts capital of Australia for decades. We need to stay that way. The only way we can do that is by supporting this fabulous industry and this fabulous College that provides people to the industry here in Melbourne.”

It’s not just about theatre. It’s not just about ‘the arts’. It’s about the hotels that are booked out every night because people are going to Jersey Boys and Wicked and everything else that comes to this town. It’s about the people who work in those hotels. It’s about the restaurants. It’s about the food producers who produce food for those restaurants. It’s an economy!” (SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09).

Bruce Atkinson – The Victorian Liberals, Member for Eastern Metropolitan Region

“In my contribution at the start of this debate I made no bones about my belief that the federal government got it wrong when it changed the funding system and left organisations such as the then Victorian College of the Arts outside the funding template. As Mr Viney says, there probably should have been a lot more kaffuffle back then in terms of attempts to address that funding issue at the federal level at that point rather than entertaining a merger or a marriage of convenience, which now seems fraught because of people’s attitudes.” (16/09/09 Hansard – VCAM Upper House Debate).

Sue Pennicuik – The Victorian Greens, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region

“When the VCA was amalgamated with Melbourne University back in 2006, a promise was made by the Government that the VCA would retain its uniqueness – it would retain its pre-eminence in the education of performing and visual arts students in Victoria and Australia for that matter....that promise looks like it’s going the way of many promises.

What we need is the Victorian Government to find some money in the arts budget, speak to their Federal colleagues about the Federal arts budget. VCA has a proud history and should have a proud future.” (SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09).

MODELS OF ARTS EDUCATION FUNDING

Training an artist is a specialised undertaking. Many Universities offer Arts degrees that are mainly theoretical with a smaller percentage of practical training. Elite arts training institutions (e.g. VCA, NIDA), traditionally offer a smaller percentage of theoretical learning and focus on highly practical and experiential learning, with a clear and defined job outcome in mind (e.g. to be an actor or a print maker or a stage manager). The parallel is often drawn between arts training and bodies like the Australian Institute of Sport, as both provide intensive training to produce elite performers.

Government run arts education and training bodies are funded in two ways – either through the Education Ministry (Minister Julia Gillard) as a higher education institution or the Arts Ministry (Minister Peter Garrett) as a cultural institution.

Being part of the University of Melbourne, VCA (VCAM) is funded through the Education Ministry, however many of its peer institutions are funded through the Arts Ministry as part of the 'Australian Roundtable for Arts Training Excellence' including:

- Australian Ballet School (VIC)
- Australian Film Television and Radio School (NSW)
- Australian National Academy of Music (VIC)
- Australian Youth Orchestra (NSW & VIC)
- Flying Fruit Fly Circus (NSW)
- National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NSW)
- National Institute of Circus Arts (VIC)
- National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NSW)

The difference between arts and education ministry funding has a huge impact on the institution and in turn, the student's experience. For instance, in 2008, the federal funding of the Teaching Program at NIDA was \$17,510 per student (p 46, NIDA Annual Report 07/08) and the federal funding of the Teaching Program at VCAM was \$9,560 (presentation by the Vice Chancellor, 25 August 2009). Moreover NIDA has much greater control over its curriculum and entry requirements e.g. NIDA hold the right to waive their Year 12 entry requirement and the Institute is not answerable to a University education paradigm (like VCA is with the Melbourne Model).

The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts is University aligned, however it is an Academy (rather than a Faculty like VCA) and was actually started by the West Australian State Government. WAAPA continues to receive funding from both State and Federal Governments.

When launching the Roundtable program the then Minister for The Arts and Sport, Senator Rod Kemp drew attention to the essential role the member organisations played in Australia culturally and economically:

“The members of the Roundtable are united by the strong belief that excellence in developing performing arts is important to Australia's future for economic, cultural and social reasons.”
(<http://www.artstraining.com/news.cfm>)

Ironically it was Mr Kemp's colleague, Education Minister Brendan Nelson, that cut VCA's funding by 35% a year after the Roundtable was formed, highlighting the gulf in funding security enjoyed by Arts Ministry funded schools and the lack of security experienced by VCA.

Throughout the SAVE VCA campaign many commentators including Geoffrey Rush (SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09), Victorian Premier John Brumby (ABC Online 27/08/09) and Victorian Arts Minister Lynne Kosky (Sunday Herald Sun 11/10/09) have called for VCA to more closely mirror the Roundtable measure of funding, particularly in comparison to NIDA.

The excerpt below is taken from the website for the The Australian Roundtable for Arts Training Excellence which details what makes member organisations qualify to be part of the body. Against these measures, it seems that without doubt Roundtable membership should be considered for VCA.

The text in bold is directly copied from the organisation's website (<http://www.artstraining.com/about.cfm>).

All members are presently funded through the Federal Government's Cultural Development Program, managed by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA).

Each is considered the elite training institute in their field - offering intensive professional training with close links to the sector, exceptional facilities and high quality student intake.

- VCA's reputation is based on providing practical-based, intensive training in highly specialised areas. VCA's courses are driven by the objective of training graduates to get work in the arts industry. It is these core values that the SAVE VCA campaign has aimed to protect.
- VCA has exceptional links to industry and ironically the SAVE VCA campaign has flushed this out. Talent agents, casting agents, producers, directors, actors and arts bureaucrats have all come out in support of the huge contribution VCA has made to the arts and the College's critical importance to arts business. Support has come from all over Australia and from other theatre communities including the West End (UK). VCA's use of sessional teachers (guest teachers) and yearly student placement programs ensure students have continuing contact with current industry practice.
- VCA is the biggest arts training campus in Australia and unique in that it is located in the CBD in the heart of the arts precinct. Melbourne Theatre Company, Chunky Move, ACCA, The Arts Centre, The Malthouse, The Recital Hall, The National Gallery and The Australian Ballet literally circle the College campus.
- Entry into the VCA is amongst the most competitive application processes in the country. The Drama school averages over 700 applications each year. The Music Theatre degree, which had its inaugural year in 2009, attracted 370 applications for 32 spots – an incredible result for a new course.

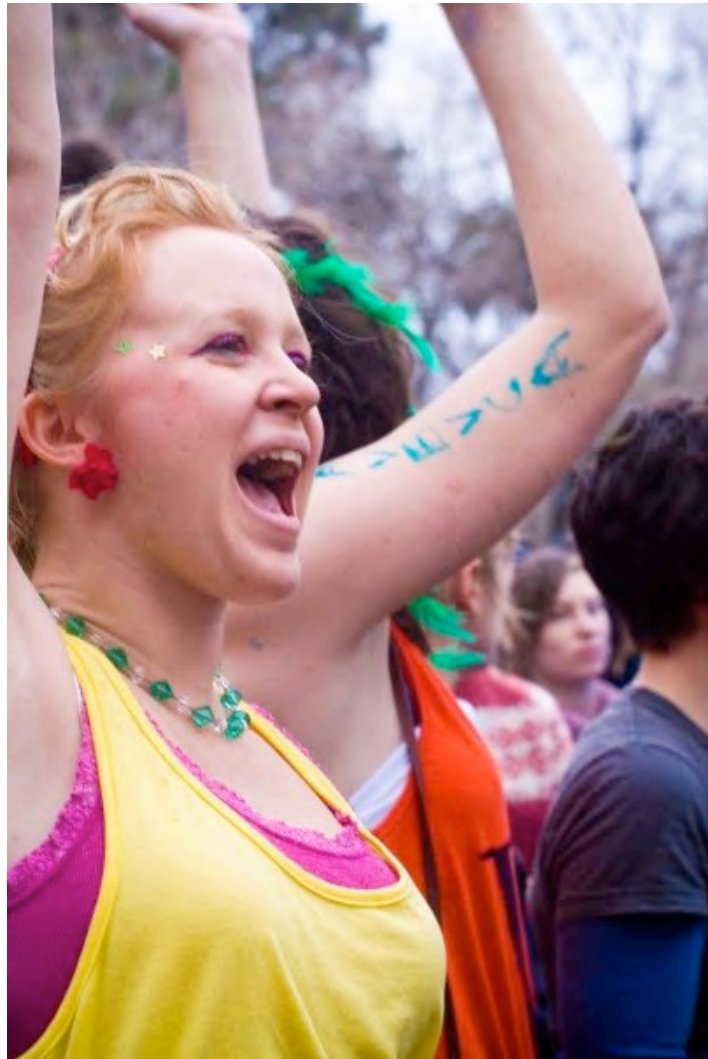
All show leadership in their area of expertise, have international profiles and relationships, successful graduates and acclaimed performances.

- VCA is unique amongst even the existing members of The Australian Roundtable for Arts Training Excellence because it excels across all major art genres and is the only school to offer all on a single campus – Drama, Dance, Production (inc Puppetry), Music (inc Music Theatre), Film & TV and Art. Indeed this is highly unusual even when compared to international institutions. VCA is also one of Australia's oldest arts training institutions, tracing its beginnings back to 1867 when it was the National Gallery of Victoria Art School.
- VCA has the distinction of having a secondary school (VCASS) aligned to it, enabling the College to provide artists with an elite education all the way from Year 7 to Post Graduate study.
- VCA also provides a specialist centre for Indigenous Australians (The Wilin Centre).
- The success of VCA graduates is obvious and world acclaimed, and most importantly stretch across all the art forms. See some of the alumni at <http://www.savevca.org/alumni.html>
- VCA attracts international students and staff from all over the world such is its reputation, including from countries as diverse as Singapore, South America, Denmark, Norway, Canada and the United States. What's more, its graduates work all over the world and have been recognised by international best practice organisations e.g. the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences (the Oscars).

- VCA performances are a staple in the Melbourne arts scene – attended and reviewed by all major arts media. When Geoffrey Rush is amongst the guest Directors for the Drama school, the standard of performance is clear.

The Roundtable aims to develop closer links to the industry generally, exchange and share research, provide each other with opportunities for cost savings and an avenue for mutual assistance.

- What an incredible opportunity that VCA truly deserves and desperately needs.



VCA Drama Student at SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09

OPTIONS

Those involved with SAVE VCA believe that the damage done to the College to date has been because decisions have been made without research or consultation.

Rather than presenting a solution, we believe lasting security and success for VCA will come from making considered choices based on evidence. As such we suggest the following action plan for VCA:

Immediate Action Required:

- The current Federal Government to re-instate the cut of 35% of VCA's revenue by the Howard Government in 2005.
- UoM to reverse curriculum, financial and structural changes to the VCA including:
 - Reinstating Puppetry and Music Theatre;
 - Returning the current VCA structure to the former school system (Drama, Dance, Production, Film & TV, Music, Art);
 - VCA Music to teach their 2009 curriculums in 2010;
 - Refund building rentals charged to date and halt rental charges until 2011 as per the Heads of Agreement's financial integration conditions;
 - Provide a two-year moratorium on all staffing changes including freezing proposed Responsible Division Management alterations.
- It is imperative the Government of Victoria invest in an economic impact study of the VCA on the State and the Nation. As outlined in this document, changes to the VCA affect jobs, people's livelihoods, arts business and tourism, and require action based on hard evidence and an understanding of VCA's place in the economy.
- UoM or Federal Government to order a full, *independent* review of curriculum, funding, leadership, administration and staffing at VCA. The aim of this review should be, through full engagement with Government, University, staff, students, prospective students, alumni and industry, to present a blueprint of what constitutes best arts training practice and ways in which to provide VCA a sustainable future, continued graduate success and providing for Australia's arts business. The findings of this review should aim to be implemented by 2012.

The scope of the review should be expansive and consider all possible outcomes including:

- **Funding:** VCA continuing as a Faculty of the University, returning to being a University affiliate, becoming a TAFE institution (like Swinburne) or becoming directly funded by the Federal Arts Ministry 'Roundtable' (like NIDA).
- **Curriculum:** VCA implementing a 'custom built' Melbourne Model, returning to its former curriculum structure or implementing revised curriculum in accordance with the independent Review.

YOU

There is not much point having a SAVE VCA campaign if we are not working in tandem with Australia's arts industry.

The best thing you can do for VCA is to tell us your thoughts. Do you use VCA graduates in your business? In what way have graduate levels of training contributed to your business? Are you concerned about the changes to VCA? Are there any immediate concerns to your business in terms of graduate supply and quality? What do you think of the Melbourne Model? What is your vision for VCA? Would you like more information?

We would also encourage you to make your opinions known to the University of Melbourne and the State and Federal Government. We have included their contact information for you overleaf.

In the coming months SAVE VCA will also be fundraising for several projects in our ongoing attempt to secure VCA's future. If you can help by donating funds, time, materials or even advice, everything is gratefully received.

Thank you for your interest in VCA and we look forward to hearing from you.

SAVE VCA
savevca@savevca.org

"What is at issue is whether Victoria is to have just another faculty of visual and performing arts, similar to those in innumerable tertiary institutions, or be the home of an outstanding national arts training institution that proudly carries and fully merits the title Australian College of the Arts."

Race Mathews Victorian Arts Minister 1982-1987
The Age 09/09/09



SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09 – Photographer Matt McFarlane

LIST OF CONTACTS

Information in the SAVE VCA campaign is constantly changing. The below contacts are provided so you can make your own enquires and stay informed:

SAVE VCA

www.savevca.org
www.facebook.com/savevca
www.youtube.com/savevca
savevca@savevca.org

University of Melbourne

Glyn Davis
Vice Chancellor
vc@unimelb.edu.au
Tel: (03) 8344 4000

Sharman Pretty
Dean of the Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music
spretty@unimelb.edu.au
Tel: (03) 9685 9300

Government – Federal

The Hon Julia Gillard MP
Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Education;
Minister for Social Inclusion.
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Tel: (02) 6277 7320 Fax: (02) 6273 4115
Email: Julia.Gillard.MP@aph.gov.au

The Hon Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Tel: (02) 6277 7640 Fax: (02) 6273 6101
Email: Peter.Garrett.MP@aph.gov.au

Government - Victoria

The Hon John Brumby
Premier of Victoria
1 Treasury Place East Melbourne VIC 3002
Tel: (03) 9651 5000 Fax: (03) 9651 5054
Email: john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon Lynne Kosky MP
Minister for Public Transport and The Arts
PO Box 6519, Point Cook Town Centre, Point Cook VIC 3030
Tel: (03) 9395 0221 Fax: (03) 9395 3061
Email: lynne.kosky@parliament.vic.gov.au

REFERENCES

References are listed in publication date order.

- 13/12/05 University of Melbourne "Growing Esteem"
http://growingesteem.unimelb.edu.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/86688/2005finalgrowingesteem.pdf
- 11/09/06 Heads of Agreement in Respect of the Integration of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) and the University of Melbourne
<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/Statutes/pdf/r55r1.pdf>
- 18/04/07 VCASU "Andrea Hull Addresses Students Regarding The Melbourne Model"
<http://www.vcasu.org.au/2007/04/19/andrea-hull-addresses-students-regarding-the-melbourne-model/>
- 10/07/07 The Age "To Be Or Not To Be"
Accessible via NewsStore <http://www.theage.com.au/fairfaxarchives>
- 30/08/07 NZ Herald "Students Protest As Professor Resigns"
http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/print.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10460638&pnum=0
- 22/09/07 NZ Weekend Herald "Cracks Appearing In The Foundation"
http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10465642
- 23/04/08 The Age "Arts College to Follow US Model"
Accessible via NewsStore <http://www.theage.com.au/fairfaxarchives>
- 19/05/08 The Age "A Model of Discontent"
Accessible via NewsStore <http://www.theage.com.au/fairfaxarchives>
- 28/05/08 The Age "Andrea Hull Prepares to Leave the VCA"
Accessible via NewsStore <http://www.theage.com.au/fairfaxarchives>
- 18/07/08 University of Melbourne "The East Coast of Australia lands a new Bachelor of Music Theatre"
<http://www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/assets/contentFiles/1/mtheatre0708.pdf>
- 12/12/08 The Age "Rethink on Melbourne Model"
<http://www.theage.com.au/national/rethink-on-melbourne-uni-model-20081214-6yad.html>
- 05/03/09 University of Melbourne "The Melbourne Model"
<http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/about/melbournemodel.html>
- 12/04/09 The Age "Pretty Well Rehearsed in Reshaping The Arts"
<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/04/12/1239474757767.html>
- 05/05/09 Crikey.com "Questions Hang Over The VCA's Future"
<http://www.crikey.com.au/2009/05/08/questions-hang-over-the-future-of-the-victorian-college-of-the-arts-and%20-music/>
- 21/05/09 The Age "Staff, Students at former VCA in Crisis Meetings"
<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/05/20/1242498804864.html>
- 05/06/09 The Australian "Campus Revolution Aims At Producing All-Rounders"
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,25587530-16947,00.html?from=public>
- 23/06/09 The Age "Uni 'Ripped Heart Out of VCA"
<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/05/22/1242498921030.html>
- 07/08/09 Crikey.com "The University of Melbourne Gags VCA Staff"
Available by subscription.

08/08/09 The Age "Job Cuts Add To VCA Woes"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/job-cuts-add-to-woes-at-vca-20090807-ecyf.html>

15/08/09 The Age "Does This Model Have Legs?"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/does-this-model-have-legs-20090814-el8u.html>

20/08/09 The Age "Arts, Music Board Members Quit"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/arts-music-board-members-quit-20090819-eqmw.html>

21/08/09 Crkey.com "VCA Uprising Engulfs Glyn Davis"

<http://www.crikey.com.au/2009/08/21/VCA-uprising-engulfs-Glyn-Davis/>

26/08/09 The Age "Arts Move Draws Howls Of Protest"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/arts-move-draws-howl-of-protest-20090825-ey4j.html>

27/08/09 The Age "Brumby Spurns Calls For Financial Help to VCA"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/brumby-spurns-calls-for-financial-help-to-vca-20090826-ezrc.html>

27/08/09 The Age "Culture Clash"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/culture-clash-20090826-ezrz.html>

27/08/09 ABC Online "Brumby Confident of Resolving VCA Dispute"

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/08/27/2668422.htm?section=entertainment>

28/08/09 The Age "Funding Hope for VCA"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/funding-hope-for-vca-20090827-f176.html>

01/09/09 The Age "VCA Alumni Fuming Over College Changes"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/vca-alumni-fuming-over-college-changes-20090731-e4ir.html>

03/09/09 The Age "Arts Head Says Give Merger A Chance"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/arts-head-says-give-merger-a-chance-20090902-f8ff.html>

09/09/09 The Age "Canvas: An independent review can provide governments with the evidence and rationale for supporting the VCA as a national college of the arts."

Accessible via NewsStore <http://www.theage.com.au/fairfaxarchives>

12/09/09 The Age "Baillieu Pledges to Save VCA"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/baillieu-pledges-to-save-vca-20090911-fkuv.html>

15/09/09 The Age "Uni Tells MPs to Butt Out"

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/university-tells-mps-to-butt-out-20090914-fnvm.html>

19/09/09 The Age "High, Wired and Handsome Kong Rises in Melbourne"

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/09/18/1253209001428.html>

11/10/09 Sunday Herald Sun "Cash Call to 'Save' School"

Accessible via Newstext <http://www.newstext.com.au/>

Please see savevca.org for links to all major media coverage.

Special thanks to the SAVE VCA photographers John Buckley, Matt McFarlane, Aaron O'Brien, Alexandra Palmer Bull.