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Music school's voice unheard

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CONCERNED academics at Melbourne University's 115-year-old music school say the future of the prestigious institution is at risk and the importance of musical scholarship is being ignored.

In a letter to *The Age*, published today, 14 signatories, including former Victoria State Opera music director Richard Divall, say an investigation into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music is focused on the VCA and ignores the "illustrious" contributions made by the former music faculty to Australian society.

"We are concerned that amid the clamour to 'save the VCA', this long tradition has been overlooked, placing the university's high reputation for music education and scholarship in jeopardy," it states.

The Faculty of Music - known affectionately as "The Con", or Conservatorium - officially amalgamated with the Victorian College of the Arts in April this year.

Following a public furore over the future of practical arts training at the VCA, the university recently launched a review of the merged faculty, led by former Telstra head Ziggy Switkowski.

Music academics told *The Age* they were "entirely sympathetic" to the concerns of VCA staff and students but were worried the former music faculty's voice was being lost in the debate. They say the school's strong performance in research is not represented in the discussion paper, which they believe is skewed towards performance.

"We're moving into a situation where the scholarly group in the former faculty of music is becoming a miniscule part of a bigger institution ... and we will lose our position as the leading research centre," says Professor John Griffiths.

Dr Switkowski has agreed that a music subcommittee be formed to consider music-specific matters. Provost Professor John Dewar will meet staff of the former music faculty on Thursday.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/music-schools-voice-unheard-20091206-kcw7.html>