



VICTORIAN COLLEGE  
OF THE ARTS

Tuesday, 5 January 2010

Mr Ziggy Switkowski  
Chairperson  
VCA Review Committee

By Email: [vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au)  
CC: [vc@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:vc@unimelb.edu.au)

**Re: VCA Discussion Paper**

Dear Mr Switkowski,

I write as one of the industry and alumni members of SAVE VCA – the organisation that was formed in May 2009 in response to staff, student and industry concern regarding the University of Melbourne changes to the Victorian College of the Arts.

The announcement of the Discussion Paper process in November 2009 was a welcome gesture that University Management were (and are) willing to consider the interests of outside stakeholders. As a result, we take this opportunity very seriously and are encouraging our 12,979 members to make considered submissions to the Review.

As part of this effort, we have received numerous queries about the Discussion Paper itself that we cannot answer and wish to seek clarification. Namely:

- **TIMING:** Should the 12/02/2010 submission deadline be extended so it falls due after students are back on campus in 2010 so they have more chance to work on submissions together?
- **INDEPENDENCE:** The Review Committee is hand-picked by the Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis and the Dean Sharman Pretty. Will the University consider some compromise to allow the 5 staff and 2 student representatives to be elected by the staff and student bodies respectively? It is also unclear whether the “one University academic from outside VCAM” need be a UoM employee?
- **TRANSPARENCY:** Will *all* submissions be published on the Discussion Paper website in a timely manner? The Review Committee’s final report is submitted to the Vice Chancellor and the Dean – will it simultaneously be made public?



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- **IMPLEMENTATION:** The recommendations of the Review Committee must be approved by the VCA Integration Committee. The three public members of the Advisory Board resigned this year and the University website says the Advisory Board member roles in the Integration Committee are not filled. Who is on this Committee? Are they independent?
- **GOVERNMENT:** There is no active engagement with Government in the review process nor is there a formal opportunity for the Victorian and Federal Governments to give a response. What is the University doing to engage Governments in this Review, especially if extra funding is being sought (either through reversing the 2005 \$5m p/a funding cut, moving VCA from the Education to the Arts Ministry like NIDA or seeking State Government support like the WA Government gives to WAAPA)?
- **LIMITATIONS IN SCOPE:** A glaring omission in the Discussion Paper process is any request for feedback on curriculum *content*. Only *structures* are offered up for discussion. Staff, students, and industry should be encouraged to detail what they believe are standard benchmarks in terms of (1) how many contact hours are necessary (2) how long should courses run, (3) what percentage should be practical, (4) how many students should be in a class etc. The Review Committee need this information to work out what curriculum and financial structure is appropriate. Will the University issue a call for this information?
- **OMISSIONS:** Will the University consider supplying a supplementary document explaining the new financial arrangements imposed on VCA since the merger, most particularly the rental scheme (which saw VCA pay \$6m in rent to UoM in 2009 for assets it owned pre merger) and the “responsible division management” of staff? This information is critically important when considering whether VCA would be best to operate as a Faculty of UoM, demerge or becoming independent.
- **UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS:** Many questions posed by the Discussion Paper require knowledge well beyond that supplied in the paper. For instance, without seeing VCA’s budget, the budgets for each discipline and having an idea of VCA’s running costs in a demerged environment, how can a respondent answer “if an independent VCA operating with the FEE-HELP program is established how will the corresponding significant increase in student fees be avoided” (question 14, page



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26)? Will the University commission an independent financial review of the College to operate in tandem with the Discussion Paper, staffed by experts in the field, to present a range of researched options that lay people can understand?

• **GENERAL QUERIES:**

1. Are the Review Committee being paid?
2. Will all Review Committee members have equal weight in putting forth recommendations? Will recommendations have to be unanimously endorsed?
3. On page 3 the statement is made “in recent years there have been substantial changes to the structure and governance of the way visual and performing arts courses have been offered in the city of Melbourne.” What is this statement based on?
4. On page 21, “Option 1” Music Theatre is considered a viable practical degree (undergraduate) and practical diploma (post graduate). However, in “Option 2” (page 22), Music Theatre disappears as an option. What makes Music Theatre Melbourne Model “non-friendly”? Conversely, on what basis are the remaining courses deemed Melbourne Model “friendly”?
5. Should the VCA become independent, there is no mention in the document as to what would happen to the \$103m worth of VCA assets UoM inherited at merger. There is also no mention of the cost UoM would charge VCA for UoM-owned land rental (the Drama and Arts buildings sit on UoM land). What options are available here?
6. On page 24 the Melbourne Model is presented as a revenue raising facility, whereby non-VCAM students are lured to study their breadth subjects at VCAM. Is this appropriate to be considered in this Review process?
7. Considering the highly controversial tenure of the new Dean Sharman Pretty, will there be any consideration of whether the current VCAM leadership should be reviewed?



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Upon your reply, we would like to publish your answers on [savevca.org](http://savevca.org) so that interested stakeholders can have this information at hand when writing their submissions.

Sincere thanks for your time and on behalf of SAVE VCA, we look forward to being of help to the Review Committee.

Kind Regards,

**Scott Dawkins**

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