

Submissions in response to the 'Defining the Future' Discussion Paper

Correspondents have been de-identified.

"[In-confidence]" indicates where the correspondent requested their response be kept private.

The views expressed in submissions are those of individual authors of the submissions only, not those of The University of Melbourne. They are published here so others can discuss them through the consultation process. The University does not sanction commentary on individuals in its consultation processes, and submissions containing comments reflecting on individuals will be returned to the authors for amendment.

No. 359

26 Feb 2010

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne

By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you on behalf of the current VCA Bachelor of Music Theatre Students.

As a group we have come from very different backgrounds and levels of experience to study Music Theatre at the Victorian College of the Arts. All of us however have been drawn here for the same reason; to study our art form intensively, with a focus on practical training, at an elite institution, with access to staff who are active and respected members of the industry, in the arts capital of Australia.

In reference to the Discussion Paper, I offer you the following feedback:

Music Theatre

We came because we believed in the reputation of the VCA and considered the opportunity to be part of a new degree at this famous institution to be both an honour and a privilege that would be foolish to decline. Now, before our first year was even completed, we learn that the value of our degree isn't recognised by the management of the VCA. The suspension of future intake into our degree threatens to compromise its ability to generate any kind of reputation within a highly competitive industry. For these reasons we believe we support the immediate re-instatement of the Bachelor of Music Theatre. Music Theatre is one of the most visible and commercially valuable live art forms in this country and provides numerous employment opportunities to graduates from the VCA as well as comparable institutions around the country. The continuation of the Musical Theatre degree would inevitably mean an increase in the number of graduates entering into commercial Musical Theatre productions. Large numbers of graduates of the WAAPA Music Theatre degree currently fill positions in commercial Music Theatre productions all around the country. Their prevalence in the industry not only cements WAAPA's reputation as an elite training institution, but also draws a high calibre of candidate to their courses year after year. The Music Theatre Degree at VCA has the potential to do the same. The benefits of a respected Music Theatre degree are valuable to the institution as a whole.

On top of their degree WAAPA also offer a one-year, fee paying certificate course to students who wish to develop their skills further before attempting entry into the Bachelor course. We suggest VCA do the same. The profits from this as well as the money gained from the 32 Commonwealth Supported Places already available to the VCA for the purposes of a Music Theatre degree should be used to fund the continuation of a VCA Bachelor of Music Theatre.

Curriculum

We support the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training and discipline specific theory. VCA should continue to offer degree-award courses across all art streams including Drama, Dance, Music Theatre, Production, Art, Music and Film and Television.

We do not believe there is a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model. This is not to say that there is no requirement for theoretical and academic learning within our course. In Music Theatre it is already offered through the compulsory subjects of 'Philosophy of performance' as well as through our 'Centre for Ideas' (CFI) subjects. Throughout our first year of study further theory was also offered through subjects in keyboard skills and music theory as well as the anatomy and physiology of vocal production. Text analysis, nutrition and muscular systems were also incorporated into our otherwise practical studies of Acting and Dance. These subjects are not delivered independent of the background and context of the artistic practice or the theoretical principles that underpin them, to suggest otherwise is an insult to the experts who design and deliver them.

We believe giving students access to subjects that broaden their knowledge whilst maintaining the depth of disciplinary excellence should be offered in place of the current compulsory CFI subjects. This should not however occur through an introduction of the Melbourne model, nor should it consume more than 12.5% of the current course load that the current CFI subjects already consume. We feel a restructuring of the Centre For Ideas to offer a range of subjects that broaden students learning but also complement their core studies would be the most desirable form for this to take. The concept of 'breadth' study independent from its connotations within the structure of The Melbourne Model should be about the development of cognitive and analytical processes that can then be applied to practice-based specialisation. It should not be a quick vacation or a hobby on the side of our core studies. That is not what we came to the VCA for.

We believe any further move away from the intensive, studio-based training in defined areas of specialisation threatens the ability of VCA's students to compete with graduates of other schools like NIDA and WAAPA, and would make VCA graduates less work-ready. This would in turn impact upon arts business by causing a decline in the availability of Victorian-based graduate artisans with the skills required to enter the workforce.

We do support regular curriculum review at VCA to ensure the College continues to meet the rapidly changing demands of students and their future employers. All reviews should include extensive consultation with all stakeholders and operate independently from VCA and University of Melbourne (UoM) management.

Funding & Structure

We support the view that the optimum outcome for VCA is to be an independent institution, capable of awarding its own degrees and managing its own curriculum.

Accordingly, we suggest that direct Arts Ministry funding (through inclusion in the Australian Roundtable program) at levels comparable to NIDA, is the best hope for a financially sound, independent VCA. We encourage the UoM to aggressively pursue this option, drawing upon the great public and industry interest in VCA evident in recent times.

In the interim, we support calls for the Federal Government to immediately reverse the 2005 \$5m p/a funding cut to VCA. We believe the Federal Government is putting great strain on both the University and VCA by holding off on this review until 2012, and is thereby threatening elite arts education in Australia.

We also support calls for the Victorian Government to commit to sustained funding for VCA to supplement the Federal contribution. We support the Victorian Shadow Minister for the Arts' suggestion that this sum be in the ballpark of \$6m p/a or alternatively in the guise of a sustained contribution to VCA infrastructure development.

We support the demerger of UoM Music and VCA Music from the 2011 academic year. We believe this outcome would return choice to the music education sphere, so that students can choose between a Melbourne Model based degree with strong ties to scholarship and research (UoM Music) and completely practical, studio-based training (VCA Music). Demerger would also address the unworkable constraints of having two music campuses. We support this demerger regardless of whether VCA remains a faculty of the University or becomes independent.

As secondary structural options, we would also support investigation of VCA being transferred to another University that was willing to retain the practical nature of VCA's courses OR VCA becoming an autonomous

VET institution. In either case, the Federal and State Governments would need to recognise the unique cost of providing elite arts education and fund VCA's new guise appropriately.

We support the pursuit of new income streams (e.g. extended post-graduate programs, open programs, pursuing international students) and believe VCA's best chance of obtaining this income is by committing to the supply of intensive, studio-based training which is most attractive to the arts education marketplace. The pursuit of international students needs to be should be conducted through the same audition process and include a cap of no more than %10 of the student body so as not to limit opportunities to local students.

Leadership

We are concerned the current senior leadership of Victorian College of the Arts & Music does not necessarily represent the views of the current staff and students. As such, we would support a review of VCAM management as part of any structural and/or funding changes, with particular preference for allowing students and staff a direct say in appointments of the Dean, Deputy Dean and Heads of School.

We support a greater, active involvement by both the Victorian State and Federal Governments at VCA, to ensure Australia's arts education and arts business landscapes are better safeguarded than has been evident throughout 2009.

Accountability

We would urge the University of Melbourne to address contraventions of the Heads of Agreement that merged UoM with VCA. Particularly:

- Reinstating the VCA name.
- Reinstating the VCA logo.
- Reinstating VCA's unique graduation ceremony.
- Reversing the alignment of VCA and UoM's funding arrangements, which was not due until the fifth year of integration.
- And in the interim of VCA's future being decided, UoM should allow VCA "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."

Students & Staff

We express concern that many talented and valuable teaching staff will not be returning to VCA in 2010.

We also express concern that suggestions the Melbourne Model would be applied to VCA, and news of staff leaving, may have impacted upon VCA's attractiveness to high calibre applicants.

As such, we would support new mechanisms to actively retain quality staff, such as formal, quarterly opportunities for VCA staff to supply feedback to VCAM Management (both anonymously and publicly).

We would also encourage a renewed drive to attract high calibre students as part of any 're-launch' of an independent VCA, through emphasising the College's continued commitment to providing 100% practical education across the entire arts spectrum.

Future

We look forward to VCA emerging from the turmoil of the last year as a stronger institution, capable of answering student demand for the highest level of intensive, wholly practical-based, studio training across the entire arts spectrum. We are confident the protection of this ideal will ensure VCA graduates will continue to have the best chance of making a career in one of the most competitive industries in the country. In doing this, we also support

No. 360
[Committee only]

1 March 2010

No. 361
Dear Review Committee,

4 March 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you as a current third year Fine Art Photography student.

In 2008 I enrolled in the VCA's Bachelor of Fine Art course after also being accepted into Fine Arts at RMIT and Monash University, on the basis of its internationally revered reputation of excellence in practical and theoretical intensive, specialist training, delivered in a practical amount of time.

I would like to strongly contest the assumption represented in Melbourne University's statements to the media that the VCA's practiced-based model for education is somehow unbalanced or lacking intellectually and in need of replacement.

Practical training does not and has not excluded academic involvement at the VCA. Practise & Performance as research or *for* research has long been accepted by the international arts community as of equivalent importance to other research models. I refer the Committee to the website of The Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (www.adsa.edu.au) which, as the peak academic body in the region, clearly recognises the importance of practice to academia. Learning by doing is not a pipe-dream.

In the VCA I have found an institution striving to serve the parallel and co-dependant career paths of artists and academics. During my time as a student I have witnessed only the highest commitment from staff and students alike to being *both* a cutting-edge place of training and also of research. I would suggest that any failure to deliver graduates of less than world class – and there has been no evidence of this to date – would be a failure caused by systematic under-resourcing, rather than a failure of ideology or curriculum.

In reference to the Discussion Paper, I offer you the following feedback:

Review Committee

I am concerned that only 2 of 9 staff and student representatives on the Review Committee were elected to their position. I am especially concerned that four unelected Heads of School are on the Committee, one of whom is Deputy Dean. Three of these Head of School are on the public record endorsing the merger and the Melbourne Model, whilst having little or no experience of pre-merger VCA. Clearly this composition casts doubt on the Review's independence and risks current staff and students self-censoring their submissions to the Review for fear of a real or perceived threat of repercussions for their work and study life. I ask the Chair to replace the 7 unelected staff and student representatives with those directly elected by the current VCAM staff and students (from a selection of volunteer candidates as opposed to the Dean and Vice Chancellor choosing the candidates). I ask the Chair to consider adding an alumni representative to the panel.

Curriculum

I support the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training. VCA should continue to offer degree-award courses across all art streams including Drama, Dance, Music Theatre, Production, Art, Music and Film and Television.

I do not believe there is a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model.

I believe any move away from the intensive, studio-based training in defined areas of specialisation threatens the ability of VCA's students to compete with graduates of other schools like NIDA and WAAPA, and would make VCA graduates less work-ready. This would in turn impact upon arts business by causing a decline in the availability of Victorian-based graduate artisans with the skills required to enter the workforce.

I do support regular curriculum review at VCA to ensure the College continues to meet the rapidly changing demands of students and their future employers. All reviews should include extensive consultation with all stakeholders and operate independently from VCA and University of Melbourne (UoM) management.

Funding & Structure

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Accordingly, I suggest that direct Arts Ministry funding (through inclusion in the Australian Roundtable program) at levels comparable to NIDA, is the best hope for a financially sound, independent VCA. I encourage the UoM to aggressively pursue this option, drawing upon the great public and industry interest in VCA evident in recent times.

In the interim, I support calls for the Federal Government to immediately reverse the 2005 \$5m p/a funding cut to VCA. I believe the Federal Government is putting great strain on both the University and VCA by holding off on this review until 2012, and is thereby threatening elite arts education in Australia.

I also support calls for the Victorian Government to commit to sustained funding for VCA to supplement the Federal contribution. I support the Victorian Shadow Minister for the Arts' suggestion that this sum be in the ballpark of \$6m p/a or alternatively in the guise of a sustained contribution to VCA infrastructure development.

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As secondary structural options, I would also support investigation of VCA being transferred to another University that was willing to retain the practical nature of VCA's courses OR VCA becoming an autonomous VET institution. In either case, the Federal and State Governments would need to recognise the unique cost of providing elite arts education and fund VCA's new guise appropriately.

I support the pursuit of new income streams (e.g. extended post-graduate programs, open programs, pursuing international students) and believe VCA's best chance of obtaining this income is by committing to the supply of intensive, studio-based training which is most attractive to the arts education marketplace.

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I support a greater, active involvement by both the Victorian State and Federal Governments at VCA, to ensure Australia's arts education and arts business landscapes are better safeguarded than has been evident throughout 2009.

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Students & Staff

I am concerned that many talented and valuable teaching staff have not returned VCA in 2010, and that there positions have not been adequately replenished despite a noticeable increase in the intake of first year students. The photography department has lost three staff members this year, leaving us with only two Sessional Technicians, one permanent & two Sessional Lecturers for Studio Studies, shared between over 60 Bachelor of Fine Art students, in addition to Honours, Masters & Post Grad students. I am concerned that the technical, conceptual and professional learning outcomes of the photography department are becoming condescended. I would like to see more funding available to all departments for increased permanent & sessional staff placements and more contact hours.

I also express concern that suggestions the Melbourne Model would be applied to VCA, and news of staff leaving, may have impacted upon VCA's attractiveness to high calibre applicants.

As such, I would support new mechanisms to actively retain quality staff, such as formal, quarterly opportunities for VCA staff to supply feedback to VCAM Management (both anonymously and publicly).

I would also encourage a renewed drive to attract high calibre students as part of any 're-launch' of an independent VCA, through emphasising the College's continued commitment to providing 100% practical education across the entire arts spectrum.

Future

I look forward to VCA emerging from the turmoil of the last year as a stronger institution, capable of answering student demand for the highest level of intensive, wholly practical-based, studio training across the entire arts spectrum. I am confident the protection of this ideal will ensure VCA graduates will continue to have the best chance of making a career in one of the most competitive industries in the country. In doing this, we also support a vibrant Australian artistic culture and ever-expanding arts business.

The function performed by the Victorian College of the Arts in the Performing Arts cannot be fulfilled by WAAPA or NIDA. The disparate orientations of each of the three elite drama schools – NIDA, WAAPA *and the VCA*, produce graduates of completely different kinds. The continued contribution of a diverse range of artists is fundamental to the future of the Arts in this country. The VCA is distinctive and it cannot be replaced.

No. 363

5 March 2010

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. We write to you as current Fine Art Photography students.

We enrolled in the VCA's Bachelor of Fine Art course on the basis of its internationally revered reputation of excellence in practical and theoretical intensive, specialist training, delivered in a practical amount of time.

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No. 364

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne
By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

5 March 2010

Re: Discussion Paper

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper, comment on what is happening at Victorian College of the Arts, and to have input into its future. As a reflection of ongoing meetings, information dissemination and response gathering, this letter voices the concerns of all Undergraduate Painting students in the School of Art.

GENERAL CONCERNS

For both incoming and continuing students who are experiencing the transition to the new model of education at the VCA from within the painting department, there's a sense of imminent threat to the unique and invaluable nature of the educational model that already exists. We hold to this model as a fluid ideal, something that has

evolved from a sound historical foundation, and will continue to evolve according to the culture within which it is firmly situated, and by which it is heavily influenced.

Changes within any institution are inevitable, but there is great concern about the potential for changes to be made without consideration of the culturally embedded place the VCA holds within the broader arts community. Our emphasis is upon changes that potentially lead to deterioration of the vocational nature of studio-based education here at the VCA. As is, we enjoy a challenging environment with what we believe to be a healthy balance between studio and theoretical curriculum. To us it functions as a thriving, proactive and interactive microcosm, and said deterioration begins for us at the ground level of curricular structure and support.

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

An immediate area of concern for painting students involves the evident cuts in staff numbers, staff hours and amenities access, each of which has a significant impact on the quality of our education.

Not only have we lost highly valued teachers, but the uncertainty surrounding their employment has affected the morale of the student and staff bodies. This particular learning environment relies upon a diversity of individual perspectives and skills. Never before has it been so widely acknowledged that historical, social and cultural narratives are constructed from multiple voices. Given the variety of individuals within the student body and the interdisciplinary nature of arts practise within the 'real world', the value of exposure to varied influences cannot be underestimated.

In addition to the inherent value of diversity, each staff member brings an extra-curricular element to their teaching. For some this is unquantifiable, involving indirect contact with or exposure to their individual professional arts practise. Others offer a very direct conduit to external arts practise, engaging students in specific projects that lead to very real exhibition experience.

As so much student work depends on technical advice and material consultation, the role of the technician in the painting department has been indispensable. Currently, at the beginning of 2010, there is no technician for the entire painting department. We fail to see how the painting department can effectively run without a technician, one of its essential components, and regard this lack of provision as such as indicative of student needs being overlooked.

One of the side effects of losing sessional staff members is increased pressure on the more permanent staff members. The permanent staff members represent the core of the learning experience at VCA. We are concerned that this core will become significantly weakened by the redistribution of the workload previously undertaken by the sessional staff members. It is already noticeably more difficult to obtain one-on-one support within the studios, as a direct result of fewer teachers and a larger student intake. This is bound to impact upon student development across the board.

To summarise, all of the painting staff contribute to the richness of the learning environment in the painting department and offer an insight into the working terrain of contemporary art in Melbourne. Without a diversity of criticism, a rich array of support and a real relationship with what happens after art school, the work produced by the students will be less informed, and therefore potentially less developed and less able to achieve the high standard that it has achieved until now.

CONCLUSION

As a department we support the specific concerns put forward by the Save VCA campaigners. We have read and understood their material, and wish to endorse the suggestions made within their response to the discussion paper.

The objective of our response letter is to inform you of internal issues specific to the painting department, and to offer you insight into the basic elements we most value within our degree course. Despite the fact that it is difficult to measure the success of artistic outcomes, the far-reaching status and reputation of the VCA as a successful and exciting educational institution is impossible to overlook. We're proud to belong to such a vibrant artistic community, one that holds great attraction to students of the past, present and the future. We ask that you consider this unique community standing, and strive to preserve the integrity of the college as a whole when making decisions about its identity and direction.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

No. 365

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne

5 March 2010

By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

Re: Discussion Paper

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you as a current third year Visual Art (Painting) student at the College, contemplating further study at VCA or elsewhere.

As a mature age student who already holds a Bachelor of Arts (Art History & Curatorship) degree with first class honours from the Australian National University in Canberra, my decision to train at the VCA was based on three factors. Firstly, the appeal of the VCA over other art schools lay in the high calibre of teachers available to me as a student. These teachers have since lost, or resigned (in protest), their positions. Secondly, I was attracted by the VCA's reputation as an art school which fostered a climate of seriousness, 'readiness' and dedication to a lifetime of practice in an industry renowned as one of the toughest. This reputation, I feel, was founded largely on a selection process determined by talent and commitment, not age quotas. Finally, the VCA's unique, independent, training based model of education appealed to me precisely because I am an older student and sought a degree structure which prioritised training that would ready me for the realities of an independent studio practice – not a career in academia. A shift in emphasis toward a more academic stream in the Fine Arts curriculum would remove what initially appealed, not only to older students such as myself, but to any training artist who is aware of the high percentage of 'abandoned' practices in the early stages of an art career that is not properly founded in independent learning skills.

In reference to the Discussion Paper, I offer you the following feedback:

I wholly endorse the recommendations submitted by the SaveVCA organisation in response to this Discussion Paper. In particular, I wish to express my concern for the independence of the Review Committee and ask that representatives be elected in a more democratic and truly representative manner.

Further, with regards to curriculum changes, I support the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training. I do not believe there is a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model. I believe any move away from intensive, studio-based training in Fine Art threatens the ability of VCA's students to compete with graduates of other art schools like SCA and COFA, and would make VCA graduates less studio-ready. This would in turn impact upon the vibrant arts culture Melbourne enjoys and its reputation as the central contemporary art 'scene' in the country.

With regards to funding and structure, I support the view that the optimum outcome for VCA is to be an independent institution, capable of awarding its own degrees and managing its own curriculum. As such, I support calls for the Federal Government to immediately reverse funding cuts to VCA and calls for the Victorian Government to commit to sustained funding for VCA. I support the demerger of UoM Music and VCA Music from the 2011 academic year.

I firmly believe that the current senior leadership of Victorian College of the Arts & Music does not necessarily represent the views of the current staff and students and as such, support calls for a review of VCAM management as part of any structural and/or funding changes.

I feel the University of Melbourne's 'School Leaver Quota' of 80% is unrealistic for a practical based training facility such as VCA and dangerous for a school which currently enjoys such a great reputation.

Finally, and most significantly, I express concern that many talented and valuable teaching staff will not be returning to VCA in 2010. The sessional staff within the painting department have been drastically reduced with significant detriment to my personal and my peers' continued development as artists. One exceptionally talented teacher in particular (and by way of example) is not returning and this is a decision which will impact upon my personal practice profoundly. As such, I would support new mechanisms to actively retain quality staff.

No. 366

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne

5 March 2010

By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

Re: Discussion Paper

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you as a Second Year Painting student, from within the School of Art.

I contributed to a collective letter, submitted on behalf of the Painting Department student body as a whole, but would like here to offer individual support to the general consensus response to the VCA Discussion Paper, as it has been expressed by the Save VCA lobby group.

I am a mature age student and the VCA attracted me with its reputation as a thriving community that holds a proactive position within real world arts communities. The standard of education has promised an incredible entry-point to external communities as such, and has so far delivered. I, like many other students past and present, am distressed by many of the proposed changes, and the cuts that have already been made. These have already had a negative effect on our own department, not to mention surrounding departments with which we are closely connected.

In reference to the Discussion Paper, I offer you the following feedback:

Review Committee

I am concerned that only 2 of 9 staff and student representatives on the Review Committee were elected to their position. I am especially concerned that four unelected Heads of School are on the Committee, one of whom is Deputy Dean. Three of these Head of School are on the public record endorsing the merger and the Melbourne Model, whilst having little or no experience of pre-merger VCA. Clearly this composition casts doubt on the Review's independence and risks current staff and students self-censoring their submissions to the Review for fear of a real or perceived threat of repercussions for their work and study life. I ask the Chair to replace the 7 unelected staff and student representatives with those directly elected by the current VCAM staff and students (from a selection of volunteer candidates as opposed to the Dean and Vice Chancellor choosing the candidates). I ask the Chair to consider adding an alumni representative to the panel.

Curriculum

I support the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training. VCA should continue to offer degree-award courses across all art streams including Drama, Dance, Music Theatre, Production, Art, Music and Film and Television.

I do not believe there is a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model.

I believe any move away from the intensive, studio-based training in defined areas of specialisation threatens the ability of VCA's students to compete with graduates of other schools like NIDA and WAAPA, and would make VCA graduates less work-ready. This would in turn impact upon arts business by causing a decline in the availability of Victorian-based graduate artisans with the skills required to enter the workforce.

I do support regular curriculum review at VCA to ensure the College continues to meet the rapidly changing demands of students and their future employers. All reviews should include extensive consultation with all stakeholders and operate independently from VCA and University of Melbourne (UoM) management.

Funding & Structure

I support the view that the optimum outcome for VCA is to be an independent institution, capable of awarding its own degrees and managing its own curriculum.

Accordingly, I suggest that direct Arts Ministry funding (through inclusion in the Australian Roundtable program) at levels comparable to NIDA, is the best hope for a financially sound, independent VCA. I encourage the UoM to aggressively pursue this option, drawing upon the great public and industry interest in VCA evident in recent times.

In the interim, I support calls for the Federal Government to immediately reverse the 2005 \$5m p/a funding cut to VCA. I believe the Federal Government is putting great strain on both the University and VCA by holding off on this review until 2012, and is thereby threatening elite arts education in Australia.

I also support calls for the Victorian Government to commit to sustained funding for VCA to supplement the Federal contribution. I support the Victorian Shadow Minister for the Arts' suggestion that this sum be in the ballpark of \$6m p/a or alternatively in the guise of a sustained contribution to VCA infrastructure development.

I support the demerger of UoM Music and VCA Music from the 2011 academic year. I believe this outcome would return choice to the music education sphere, so that students can choose between a Melbourne Model based degree with strong ties to scholarship and research (UoM Music) and completely practical, studio-based training (VCA Music). Demerger would also address the unworkable constraints of having two music campuses. I support this demerger regardless of whether VCA remains a faculty of the University or becomes independent.

As secondary structural options, I would also support investigation of VCA being transferred to another University that was willing to retain the practical nature of VCA's courses OR VCA becoming an autonomous VET institution. In either case, the Federal and State Governments would need to recognise the unique cost of providing elite arts education and fund VCA's new guise appropriately.

I support the pursuit of new income streams (e.g. extended post-graduate programs, open programs, pursuing international students) and believe VCA's best chance of obtaining this income is by committing to the supply of intensive, studio-based training which is most attractive to the arts education marketplace.

Leadership

I am concerned the current senior leadership of Victorian College of the Arts & Music does not necessarily represent the views of the current staff and students. As such, I would support a review of VCAM management as part of any structural and/or funding changes, with particular preference for allowing students and staff a direct say in appointments of the Dean, Deputy Dean and Heads of School.

I support a greater, active involvement by both the Victorian State and Federal Governments at VCA, to ensure Australia's arts education and arts business landscapes are better safeguarded than has been evident throughout 2009.

Accountability

I would urge the University of Melbourne to address contraventions of the Heads of Agreement that merged UoM with VCA. Particularly:

- Reinstating the VCA name.
- Reinstating the VCA logo.
- Reinstating VCA's unique graduation ceremony.
- Reversing the alignment of VCA and UoM's funding arrangements, which was not due until the fifth year of integration.
- And in the interim of VCA's future being decided, UoM should allow VCA "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."

Students & Staff

I express concern that many talented and valuable teaching staff will not be returning to VCA in 2010.

I also express concern that suggestions the Melbourne Model would be applied to VCA, and news of staff leaving, may have impacted upon VCA's attractiveness to high calibre applicants.

As such, I would support new mechanisms to actively retain quality staff, such as formal, quarterly opportunities for VCA staff to supply feedback to VCAM Management (both anonymously and publicly).

I would also encourage a renewed drive to attract high calibre students as part of any 're-launch' of an independent VCA, through emphasising the College's continued commitment to providing 100% practical education across the entire arts spectrum.

Future

I look forward to VCA emerging from the turmoil of the last year as a stronger institution, capable of answering student demand for the highest level of intensive, wholly practical-based, studio training across the entire arts spectrum. I am confident the protection of this ideal will ensure VCA graduates will continue to have the best chance of making a career in one of the most competitive industries in the country. In doing this, we also support a vibrant Australian artistic culture and ever-expanding arts business.

No. 367

5 March 2010

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne

By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

Re: Discussion Paper

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you as a current second year student in the Bachelor of Fine Arts.

From the time I was 17 years old, living in India I aspired to the best art schools. My move to Melbourne and 4 years of hard work later, being able to attend the VCA as a local student is a dream come true. I believe it is the culture of the college and the city that enable me to express my life in the way that I do.

In reference to the Discussion Paper, I offer you the following feedback:

Review Committee

I am concerned that only 2 of 9 staff and student representatives on the Review Committee were elected to their position. I am especially concerned that four unelected Heads of School are on the Committee, one of whom is Deputy Dean. Three of these Head of School are on the public record endorsing the merger and the Melbourne Model, whilst having little or no experience of pre-merger VCA. Clearly this composition casts doubt on the Review's independence and risks current staff and students self-censoring their submissions to the Review for fear of a real or perceived threat of repercussions for their work and study life. I ask the Chair to replace the 7 unelected staff and student representatives with those directly elected by the current VCAM staff and students (from a selection of volunteer candidates as opposed to the Dean and Vice Chancellor choosing the candidates). I ask the Chair to consider adding an alumni representative to the panel.

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No. 369

6 March 2010

Dear Review Committee,

I am writing to you as a current third year drama student and one representative of the concerns of many. Despite finding the lack of publicity about the discussion paper to students frustrating, (i.e. no emails to the student portal asking for input) I applaud the sentiment of giving students, staff, industry and members of the public a say in what is a very important educational institution to the Melbourne Arts Industry, economy and society.

This is an extremely important issue for Victoria and Australia. Arts schools are limited and their requirements are unique.

I have been a student heavily involved in the fight for the future of the VCA. I was a key organiser of the protest action held in August of last year. The protest has been frequently misinterpreted by senior VCAM management, as well as the University as an "hysterical" act based on "misinformation." I would like to clear up this misinterpretation by stating that the strong student and community action resulted from a lack of consultation and information made publicly available about the future of the VCA. It should be noted that at no point prior to the protest action largely put together by students had there been any mention of a discussion paper or consultation process about the future of the VCA to students.

I am now glad to be able to write to the review panel, and am glad that my colleagues have had the same opportunity, though I don't feel that were I to express an opinion, that it would be considered fairly.

I am concerned and have been for some time about the management of the college in its present form and what this means for the college's future. In the discussion paper, a demerger between the VCA and the University is presented as an option. Yet already the University has taken over management of the VCA. There is one sign left at the VCA stating that it is the VCA and so how can I indeed feel that the university considers it an applicable option for our future.

Furthermore, the University has chosen to elect Heads of Schools to represent the different disciplines of the VCA. How it can be the University's (or Dean's) decision to elect a review panel which is making decisions about the future of something that they have a heavy stake in and not be considered biased is beyond me. Of the 14 members of the review panel, the Heads of Schools, make up nearly one third of the review panel. And unlike the student representative, and student union president Shane Woon, who is a democratically elected representative of stakeholders in this review, the Heads of Schools are not democratically elected.

Why is this a problem? Three of these Heads of Schools, are new to the VCA. They bring with them a new philosophy, structures and ideas etc... about how they would like the new VCA or faculty of VCAM to run. They were hired by the university. They are employees of the University. There is no doubt about their entitlement to bring their energy and ideas to the table in their new place of power, but really, how is a demerger, an independent VCA, a VCA that holds onto the principles on which it was founded, that carries forward the spirit it had pre-university merger, to really be a consideration when the college and indeed, the review panel, "defining the future" for the VCA is already tainted by the considerations of the University.

I will give example to this. While representing students to the Dean and the Heads of Schools as part of a group of students who attended weekly or perhaps fortnightly meetings with the Dean and Heads of Schools, we were exposed not to consultation as we had requested but to a group of individuals unwilling to consider life at the VCA without the Melbourne Model. Now this is not to make a statement about the validity of the Melbourne Model, but instead to say that the Melbourne Model shouldn't be the first and last consideration for the VCA but only an option which can just as quickly be deemed inappropriate as it is suggested.

I do not feel that the review panel will have the appropriate insight or diversity of interests to truly make democratic decisions about the future of the VCA. I do not feel that the university who has removed almost all trace of the logo of the Victorian College of the Arts, and now joined our music school with their own while attempting to conduct an unbiased review of the future of the VCA that is suggestive of the probably popular option of demerger, can claim to have integrity of process. With all due respect to the democratically elected and third-party members of the review panel, I cannot make a submission, because I believe the process is flawed and my submission will be of no consequence.

I am currently a PhD student at the VCAM Art School.

I am going to confine my discussion to the VCAM Art School, as it is the only one of the schools that I have some knowledge of. I do have some experience in working as an artist and I have also lived in Germany. I have lectured sessionally in 5 different art schools in Melbourne including the VCA. I am not an alumnus of the VCA.

I have particularly enjoyed lecturing at the VCA as I have found the students engaging and inspiring. It seemed to have attracted and selected talented and keen students. In some of the other institutions that I have taught, there has been more ambivalence from some of the students of their vocation of becoming artists.

I wonder how being under the umbrella of the University alone can assure the VCAM Art School's future. The School needs to have a diversity of supporters I am mindful that there are a number of philanthropists that have endowed parts and I hope that the future institution honours the wishes of these philanthropists. I think the state and Federal governments need to independently fund the VCAM Art School as well. The VCA Art School needs also to re-form a connection with the NGV. Without a limited autonomy, the VCAM remains vulnerable to the shifts that University of Melbourne makes. I am mindful of recent precedents where Deakin University sold off the Stonington site. I am also mindful of **The Towards 2011**, discussion paper that was recently released by the university of Melbourne (http://www.provost.unimelb.edu.au/towards_2011/report_feedback) which may see further erosions of the VCAM's strengths, if its recommendations were implemented.

Of course, there are incredible benefits for both institutions remaining aligned. Student from the VCAM Art School can have the benefit of being able to take other subjects from the University of Melbourne. Just as Students from very different disciplines can have access to understanding artistic processes and develop an understanding of how art can function as a discursive element in cultural dialogue. This would also give courses in the humanities from Parkville such as the History of Art, Art conservation and curatorial courses hands on experience.

I would advocate a core studio based course in Fine Art, with side streams where other parts of the university can engage with the art school.

The core studio course would have a reduced intake. Small enough so all places can be supported by scholarship positions (cooper Union is an example) to guarantee merit and equality based entrance these places could be tagged by philanthropy as a way of attracting donors.

Small enough to attract the round table funding (as I am sure the Federal Government would only want to provide ongoing funding to a limited number of places).

The VCA schools may have to be separated to attract the round table funds as other parts of the VCAM would duplicate other schools in Australia; Mindful that there is no other art school that is getting this funding (although there maybe other schools in other cities already trying to position themselves for it). The VCA is well positioned for this funding as it has helped to produce artists who are not only masters of their disciplines but also of intellectual and conceptual rigor this is not always the case with some of the other art schools in Australia.

There are other more extreme solutions (an idea put forward by a colleague of mine) to secure regular funding and that is developing the site with a series of towers and VCAM having a series of floors allocated to it and the sale or rent of the other floors providing a re-invested perpetual income for the running of the schools.

I think it is important to acknowledge that the institution has been significantly degraded through continual attrition of funds this has put extraordinary pressure on tenured academic staff who have been stretched further to make up for the significant loss of sessional staff. Despite this the VCAM Art School still produces some of the leading national and international artists from Australia.

Its success is not necessarily reflected in the overseas awareness of it. It needs to have the resources for it to assume its appropriate place in international discourse. The Center of Ideas and the Margaret Lawrence Gallery and some of the staff have made projects involving interesting linkages with artists' internationally. But resources available to the institution such as what they can offer visiting artists has been minimal, The programs need to offer adequate incentives for visiting artists (indeed it is often impossible to get a visa for a one off visiting artist talk to pay them appropriately this needs to be addressed with university and foreign affairs, at other schools I have know of visiting artists to have been paid through book vouchers from American multinational bookstores or alternatively with modest lunch shouts).

The RMIT University International studio program is exemplary in creating an international discourse with its network of studios in Asia and also reciprocal studios in Europe. Like RMIT, the VCAM Art School should be working more closely with institutions such as ACCA and the NGV. The VCAM must not even have the resources to subscribe and post listing on

<http://artandeducation.net/>. The authoritative website on all things happening international in relation to art and education!

One idea would be to establish a gallery at the NGV international where visiting artists can have joint residency and exhibitions and do projects with students and local artists at VCA the proximity is perfect. In Germany I have observed that there is much greater sharing between institutions. The VCAM Art School should not only be a pedagogical and studio based institution but also a site where interaction, projects and discourse can happen. The Center of Ideas and Margaret Lawrence Gallery have been implementing This but it need to be more highly resourced I would suggest that many of the best art schools (eg Staedle) have significant programs of visiting Artists (curators philosophers etc) where the visitor would do a lecture, work on a project with students (and/or other artists) and give individual and group tutorials with students. Of course art education is changing and the postgraduate research area is growing and having interesting and unexpected impacts and evolving the institution and staff in this area are pioneering new methodologies.

Of interest for me in seeing where art and the academia is heading is a recent symposium at the Tate titled: Creative Scholars Research Economies in Art and Design available in 6 hours of free podcast on <http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/podcast/feed.xml>

I have also found a podcast of **Robert Storr talking in relation to the Arts School and its relationship within the university:** <http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Feed/yale.edu.1322259033.01322259041>

I just would like to make the point that these opinions are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of those close to me.

No. 371

12 March 2010

**Defining the Future for the VCA at the University of Melbourne Discussion Paper:
RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE AND SPATIAL PRACTICE
12th March 2010**

We express our thanks at being included in discussion on the necessary expansion and evolution of the Victorian College of the Arts. As a reflection of ongoing meetings, this letter voices the concerns of all Undergraduate Sculpture and Spatial Practice students in the School of Art.

The student body of the S&SP department of VCA believes that there are two immediate issues that need to be raised for discussion concerning our current curriculum: ***the loss of sessional staff and the loss of a specific sculpture technician.***

In addition to informing the Review Committee of the reality of the S&SP student experience in 2010 we will detail our experiences of the teaching philosophy of the School of Art as a prominent component of the VCA.

THE LOSS OF SESSIONAL STAFF MEMBERS

Our immediate concern regards recent and sudden changes to our departments staffing. Upon resuming our academic year, we find that our department has:

- **Lost five sessional staff members,**
- **Is run now by only three lecturers and**
- **No specific technician.**

The remaining staff must now stretch their time over forty-seven undergraduate students - a larger number than previous years - whilst juggling other responsibilities such as post-graduate supervision and administrative duties.

The staff of the S&SP Department at VCA takes pride in delivering a rigorous education. Whilst they demand a scrupulous work ethic in order to prepare us for our own professional practices after VCA, we contest the pressure they have been put under to merely maintain the caliber of previous years.

Until now, this type of education has been made possible through a variety of dedicated staff members who in the past have:

- Promoted compulsory attendance to the studio 9.30am -5.30pm, 5 days a week.
- Given us access to a wide range of practicing artists and professionals in the industry via group and **individual tutorials.**
- Allowed Workshop access daily from 9.30am - 7.30pm to learn, develop and refine technical skills.

Below is a brief summary of the general contributions the lost staff members possess that we are no longer privy to:

- All are practicing artists.
- Excellent critical input and advice on a professional level.
- Practical and conceptual input aiding the development of all students work.
- Access to a range of opinions, resources and knowledge.

Their skills and interests are **fundamental** to the development of our practices as students of sculpture and spatial practice. The more specific skills of each of the personnel we no longer have access to, are detailed below:

Ryan Foote

- Our workshop technician in previous years whose employment ultimately allowed us access to the workshop after hours.
- Taught technical skills as well as **safe and effective handling of tools and machinery** within all areas of the workshop.
- He is currently a prominent practicing artist in Melbourne and has contributed much to the practical and conceptual development of many students work.

Scott Mitchell

- Currently completing a PhD.
- Offered the highest degree of academic and technical ability.
- His valuable contribution included: electrical engineering, woodworking, welding, mould-making, casting and rigorous critical feedback.

Kat Clarke

- Completed her M.A. in Fine Art in 2009 at the VCA.
- The Vulcan Steel Award Scholarship funded Kat's tutorship.
- We have lost a profitable academic and technical link to an emerging artist and current post-graduate student.

Kate McMahon

- Holds a M.A in Fine Art
- Professional Landscape Architect.
- Her expertise involves: training in issues related to professional developmental processes, self-promotion, presentation/public speaking, administration, managing finances and working within related industries.

Carolyn Eskdale

- Currently completing a PhD at Melbourne University.
- Her core interests related to site-specificity, installation practice, process and expanded spatial practices.

Laura Woodward

- Recently commenced a PhD at Melbourne University.
- The Manager of an extensive artist studio complex.
- Her contribution included metal work, electronics and the managing of commissions and public projects.

THE LOSS OF THE SPECIFIC SCULPTURE TECHNICIAN

The loss of the sculpture technician hinders both the S&SP Department and the School of Art Workshop. We believe it poses serious Occupational Health and Safety risk to all students as:

- **Sam Muratore is now the only technician available and his primary job is to supervise the workshop for the entire population of the School of Art.**

To ensure student health and safety, while utilising the very large, segmented workshop spaces, there must be adequate supervision of students. It contains potentially hazardous equipment that we feel requires more than one supervisor present to monitor the use of this equipment.

In addition to OH&S issues, the loss of a departmental technician has resulted in the reduction of workshop access. Our studies are connected to the workshop at a **fundamental** level and restricting our access to this facility will impact greatly upon the development and quality of our work. It was demonstrated to us in the first week back at school that under current VCA standards:

- **Whenever Sam is unavailable for any reason, the workshop will be closed.**
- Flexible working hours outside of scheduled studio time is no longer possible without additional technicians.

Living in this current economic climate, students more than ever, are required to work part time jobs in order to pay rent, bills and increased university fees. In previous years when the workshop was open until 7.30pm – **many of the S&SP students utilised the workshop until this time.**

This access enabled us to develop the best quality of work to a high degree of ambition and resolve. We are extremely concerned that we no longer have this access and flexibility. In comparison with other related

institutions, access hours at the VCA have been minimal for some time, therefore to cut those, further compromises our very status as a competitive Australian art school.

ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

The Fine Art course at the VCA has for some time provided a unique critical and studio-based program. Aside from personally developing our work in the studio and workshop we are enrolled in and exposed to a range of interests through the Critical and Theoretical Studies and the Centre for Ideas programs.

We feel that the Critical and Theoretical Studies program provides us with adequate academic content or “depth” in the following ways:

- It feeds our work by delivering lectures and tutorials focusing on developing knowledge of and interpreting the historical art record.
- We receive tuition on visual analysis and constructing written responses to artworks.
- A platform for group critique of our presentations and other art related literature is made possible by this program.

The Centre for Ideas program, although in need of constant reworking to suit student feedback provides us with “breadth” in the form of professional development by exposing us to:

- A variety of industry speakers and artist forums.
- A choice of special interest seminars rooted in, for example Philosophical, Political, Socio-economical, Scientific and Cultural concerns.
- Collaborative opportunities within other Departments.

If the choice were present to take a “breadth” subject at the Parkville Campus, we believe that many students at the School of Art would take up the offer while others would prefer to study subjects offered on the Southbank Campus for instance, Digital Applications and Multimedia.

The structure has enabled the historical degree to deliver specialised, studio-based education while incorporating broader critical, practical and academic concerns crucial to the development of independent art practitioners. **As a department within VCA we feel that the integrity of the program we originally signed up for is being negated. We believe it is under immediate threat for the following reasons:**

- The gradual restructuring of our curriculum has begun to undermine the specialised approach that this school is renowned for.
- We are faced with immediate changes that challenge our very ability to remain productive in the short-term.
- This year with limited staff, the quality of the teaching previously delivered by a staff cohort who possessed a range of skills, experiences and differences in approach, is in jeopardy.
- As previously noted, the situation at the time of writing is that the workshop machinery will lie dormant as students are locked out, struggling to merely book consultation with the little staff that remains.

We call for the immediate reinstatement of a sculpture technician, expansion of access to the sculpture workshop, and the appointment of sessional staff to deliver the standard of education promised to us when we enrolled in The Victorian College of the Arts.

We support the notion of change and adaptation to a new environment at the VCA, as long as ***the education of art is based on a philosophy of hands-on, process oriented and discussion rich process.*** To be asked to adapt to an educational environment where there are less professional artists as teachers, with less working access and no reduction in fees is ludicrous.

If VCA students are to compete with and contribute to the national and global art community, we must have training in an environment that is of the highest quality. Not an environment that will compromise the quality of students work and in turn, the quality of graduating artists.

We feel that the services provided at the VCA were approaching this standard until recent cuts occurred, and we are extremely anxious about our current situation. We are fearful that the school will cease to appeal to talented Australian students let alone to our International counterparts as the artist training institution it is renowned for.

Please consider this contribution by the Sculpture and Spatial Practice Department when making any decisions about the future of the VCA. We look forward to the opportunity to present our case to the Review Committee.

Thank you for your time,

On behalf of undergraduate S&SP students within the School of Art: