

REPORT of the REVIEW COMMITTEE in RESPONSE to the VCAM DISCUSSION PAPER

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1. General Observations

- The vision of the VCA and Music (VCAM) to develop talented artists, researchers, and teachers who are able to meet the needs of the arts profession and broader community including as elite performers and creative individuals is affirmed.
- Research through studio practise and the relevance of graduate programs are affirmed.
- Both the former VCA and Faculty of Music have a distinguished and proud history of producing outstanding graduates and enriching the cultural environment especially in Victoria but also nationally. But the combined institution is not consistently excellent, its processes need improvement, and students rightly worry about reducing resources and amenity. While a strategy to achieve an inspirational and lofty vision would be intellectually satisfying, the higher priority is first to define an implementable path of continuous improvement for the next 5 years.
- A major element of the teaching methodology of the VCA and Music rests upon studio-based learning, intensive practice, and performance. This is an expensive form of education and training but underpins the distinctive culture of the VCA and Music and the competencies of its graduates, and is appropriately sensitive to the evolving needs of the professions and industry.
- The academic and funding challenges are different in the various disciplines and will benefit from immediate and focused attention within a faculty structure supportive of pedagogical and professional diversity.
- The VCAM operates with a budget deficit of at least \$6million per year. This financial gap, and other costs, is covered by the University of Melbourne under an agreement

which expires at the end of 2011. The financial pressures vary by School with the School of Music closest to a breakeven operating performance.

- The Federal Government funding formula is applied fairly to the VCA and Music given the existing rules. Arguments can be made that there should be increased financial support from the Commonwealth as well as State Government in parallel with productivity improvements across the VCAM.

2. Findings

The Review Committee recommends the following:

- The combination of the former VCA and Faculty of Music to continue as a faculty within the University of Melbourne.
- Recognizing the distinctive curriculum and funding challenges for Art, Performing Arts, and Film and TV on the one hand, and Music on the other, establishment of two divisions within the (renamed?) Faculty: the Melbourne Institute For The Arts (MIFTA, or other possibilities such as Melbourne Institute for the Contemporary Arts, MICA, or even the VCA - all hereinafter referred to simply as MA), and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, each with a Director and continuing to offer degrees and diplomas as determined by various curricula.
- The faculty organizational construct would see the two division Directors reporting to a Head who leads a small faculty administration performing certain support functions and coordinating with the University as required.
- MA would include as recognized individual Schools the current disciplines of Art, Performing Arts, and Film and Television and continue to be Southbank based. The Conservatorium would be headquartered at Parkville until such time as a new building makes a move compelling. Its academic courses would be primarily Parkville-based while elite performance training would be shared between the Southbank and Parkville campuses as is currently the case. Music would include contemporary music performance (improvisation).
- MA and the Conservatorium should have separate budget and balance sheets, and curriculum committees that would undertake the urgent task of curriculum review and development, and identify the basis of any funding shortfalls. Each Director would have responsibility for budgetary, staffing and curriculum decisions. School-specific undergraduate and graduate degree-based and non-award curricula should be designed which reflect the respective teaching mission, proposed structure and its budget. It is expected that the centrality of studio practice and the talent-based entry principle would be reinforced in such a review.
- As part of such a curriculum review, an operating plan and staffing profile could be developed to advance MA to a best-in-class environment of studio practise

and research, and the destination of choice in our region for postgraduate coursework and arts research.

- After all cost allocations, all Schools operate at a deficit and will do so for some time in the absence of additional funding. While suggestions for improving financial outcomes for the former VCA were proposed, no silver bullet emerged. The detail of possible incremental changes is self evident but the future of the VCAM visual and performing art education is dependent upon the continuing support of the University of Melbourne. Such support appears consistent with the University's goals for excellence in training, research and engagement in music and the visual and performing arts. It is recommended that the process of curriculum review and development be accompanied by the development of a sustainable financial model and that this include, where necessary, efforts to attract additional external funding in particular from state government and from income earning outreach programs.
- All Schools should have budgetary certainty with explicit and continuing financial support consistent with their high contact studio-based teaching models. At the same time, the schools should be encouraged to engage with their respective professions to increase learning opportunities and generate possibilities for sponsorship and in-kind support for appropriate programs
- The opportunities for Music Theatre and Puppetry should be re evaluated and industry input and support sought.
- While the distinctive multidisciplinary character of the former VCA is acknowledged and interdisciplinary collaboration would continue to be strongly encouraged, such cooperation need not be structural as students and staff are likely to collaborate if it is in their interests.
- The VCAM name has some brand value but also carries some legacy burdens and should be reconsidered for the naming of the overarching faculty.
- The Conservatorium should continue in its effective deployment of the Melbourne Model (MM) while having the flexibility to accept talent-based entry and to develop a performance only curriculum.
- MA should postpone introduction of the MM pending further consultation with the professions, and until after its review of curriculum is completed and a financial and pedagogical strategy is defined and comprehensively communicated. Then a transition path of some years' duration might be considered to begin after the 2012 academic year.
- The role of the Common Curriculum as currently offered, and The Centre for Ideas, should be re examined in the context of any curriculum changes and options for breadth subjects in the future.
- The Committee noted the past contributions of the VCA in the arts industry and also its contribution to the recognition factor for the reputation of Melbourne as an arts capital. In this context the perceived talent drain of gifted young artists

away from Victoria and reputational damage because of current uncertainties surrounding the VCAM were noted with concern.

There is much interest and logic in developing the Southbank precinct as an Arts hub given the presence of the VCAM, major performing arts companies, University of Melbourne assets, and other available real estate. Such a concept is consistent with the goal of demonstrating leadership by Victoria in the arts. The committee endorsed this approach and recommended, as the first step, consultation with the community and governments about the development of a visionary proposal for a national multidisciplinary elite arts training and education institution, based at Southbank, with funding from both the Federal and State governments. This remains an open item with obvious links to any precinct development strategy.

3. Terms of reference

In 2009, the coincidence of a number of developments created an atmosphere of uncertainty and concern about the VCAM.

The arrival of a new dean, steps to reduce costs and streamline processes, the deployment of the Melbourne Model with its breadth subjects, and the continuing integration of the VCA and Faculty of Music under the University umbrella combined to stress even carefully planned change processes which, in any event, were not always the case.

The discussion paper, **Defining the Future** *for the VCA and Music at the University of Melbourne* released in November 2009 described the broad set of issues which the review committee was invited to address.

The discussion paper suggested a number of questions for debate in the broad categories of

- curriculum options
- structure of the faculty
- relationship to the University

These questions were intended to focus the content of submissions to the Review and to guide the committee's work.

In practice, the committee's work followed the spirit of this paper rather than the detail although a number of written submissions were eloquent in their expert commentaries on each of the 24 questions posed.

In addition to its helpful summary of the influences which shaped today's VCAM, the value of this discussion paper was the range of options that was legitimised as open for committee debate.

In the approximately 4 months of the committee's existence, effort was mostly directed at understanding the current strengths and weaknesses of the VCAM and identifying potential steps ahead which would assist the institution in meeting the expectations of its many stakeholders, and advance it towards its vision.

This Report stops short of proposing an inspirational strategic plan for the VCAM, or describing a future state when the VCAM could claim to be the 'jewel in the crown' of the University of Melbourne, the State of Victoria and the nation. There is simply too much to do in the short term to stabilize the VCAM and set it on the right path.

This was the context for the committee's work.

This committee's work especially benefitted from two important earlier reports:

- ✓ VCA Curriculum Audit, 1998 (aka Robinson Review)
- ✓ Review of Music for Planning and Budget Committee (2007)

4. Committee membership

The members of the committee were as follows:

Associate Prof Su Baker	Head of Art
Associate Prof Jon Cattapan	Southbank staff representative
The Hon Mary Delahunty	Community representative
Prof Kristy Edmunds	Deputy Dean and Head of Performing Arts
Mr Trevor Green	Chair, VCAM Advisory Board (until Feb 2010)
Mr Ian Wilcock	Chair, VCAM Advisory Board (after Feb 2010)
Prof Cathy Falk	Representative of former Faculty of Music
Prof Ian Lang	Head of Film and Television
Mr Brian Long	VCAM professional staff
Mr Richard Mason	Postgraduate student representative
Prof Gary McPherson	Head of Music
Prof Pip Pattison	University representative
Mrs Eda Ritchie	Vice Chancellor's representative
Mr Shane Woon	Undergraduate student representative
Dr Ziggy Switkowski	Independent Chair
Ms Lisa Lansfield	Project Officer

The Review was undertaken by the fourteen committee members, and the assistance of the project officer, with a minimum of ten members at most meetings.

It was uncommon to have a unanimous view on any issue, or even a majority one where several alternatives were discussed.

This is not surprising and neither time nor temperaments allowed for continuing debate until consensus was reached in every case.

Our Findings should then be interpreted as ones which had more support than alternatives and which fit logically within the overall outcomes.

But reasonable people could, and did, hold strongly different views.

5. Review Processes

In December 2009, the discussion paper called for submissions to this review and set a deadline of February 10, 2010.

At the request of various undergraduate groups, this deadline was extended and submissions continued to be accepted during March.

In total, 371 submissions were received and posted on the VCAM Review website www.vcam.unimelb.edu.au/discussion.

The committee met on six occasions:

- 5 February, 9-11am
- 25 February, 9-11am
- 10 March, 9-11am
- 23 March, 9-12 noon (9-11am Finance Presentations – Allan Tait and Katherine Kennedy)
- 29 March, 8:30-11am
- 9 April, 1-3pm

and held two full day consultations on March 2 and 17 during which the following individuals and groups presented:

- Andrew Mott, Blackburn High School
- David Price and fellow FTV staff
- Frederica Cunningham and fellow VCAM students
- Hilary McPhee
- John Hopkins

- Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance - Louise Connor, Sarah Rogan, Noni Hazlehurst, Neil Pigot (Mar 29)
- Noel Turnbull, Noel Denton, Lynne Landy, Race Mathews
- NTEU - Matthew McGowan, Alex White
- Richard Gill
- Richard Mills
- Save VCA - Scott Dawkins, Roslyn Walker, Nerida Wallace
- VCAM Dean, Sharman Pretty
- UNIMA - Gilly McInnes, Jennifer Pfeiffer, Nancy Black, John Barcham, Penelope Bartlau
- VCAM Film & TV School Course Advisory Committee – Shaun Miller, Natalie Miller, Russell Yardley
- VCASS - Colin Simpson, Michael Sargeant

Such meetings were usually at the invitation of the committee, but time was made available for other people who wanted to meet with the committee or the chairman, and a number took advantage of this opportunity.

The chairman also held forums with various student groups:

- School of Music Students - 12 noon – 1pm, Tues 23 March
- School of Performing Arts Students – 1-2pm, Tues 23 March
- Film and Television/School of Art Students – 1:30-2:30pm, Wed 24 March

6. Submissions and Consultations - key themes

Given the large volume of submissions, it is unsurprising that a wide spectrum of views was presented covering the history of the former VCA, the nature of today's various challenges, and the proposed solutions to them.

However four themes recurred sufficiently often to be specifically recognised.

Firstly, many commentators pointed to the funding reductions following the Higher Education Support Act (2003) as being the cause of the considerable financial pressures upon the VCAM today. And that in an attempt to balance the budget, it was asserted that the former VCA were forced to make decisions that compromised the quality of the learning experience and moderated their vision to be a distinctive, elite arts training organization. In this case the solutions were usually calls for increased funding with a number of possible avenues being suggested.

Secondly, many people recall the former VCA fondly, hold it in high esteem and talk about past golden eras. Changes to its mission, structure, resourcing, and pedagogy were criticized for weakening an arts institution with a proven history of success. The proposed remedies centred upon returning the organization to its roots albeit variously defined.

Thirdly, the commissioning of this review was seen as a response to the increasing community concern about decisions taken and changes initiated specifically over the last 12 months. Hopes were expressed that this review might revisit some of these decisions and set upon a different path.

Finally, input to this review was generally motivated by a shared desire to help make the VCAM an arts institution of national and international consequence, the 'jewel in the crown' within the University of Melbourne, the State of Victoria and nationwide.

These submissions and presentations certainly helped shape the committee's thinking. On the other hand, the urgent and important task was pragmatically defined as the set of steps needed to rebuild confidence in and within the VCAM, and provide sufficient strategic clarity for evidence-based decision making by the faculty leadership and the University.

7. Student feedback

To many an observer, the attitudes and priorities of the student population that makes up the faculty of VCAM set them apart from other tertiary students.

The immense effort or prodigious talent required to succeed in a demanding and competitive talent-based selection process across the arts results in undergraduates emotionally bonded to their institution, fiercely committed to their artistic vocation and very focused in their work.

Although data indicate that fewer than half of the graduates will professionally practise their art, and fewer still will earn a reasonable living at it, students insist on specialization at every opportunity, prepared to take their chances once in the job market.

Accordingly, students suggest they want longer semesters, more contact hours, more rehearsal time, more testing (via performances and peer reviews) and extended campus hours not because they may function better at night, but because they want to fit more work into each day on the 'path towards mastery'.

The priorities for arts students are, however, universal:

- access to great teachers
- well designed curriculum with time to practise
- a high quality peer group
- access to, and opportunities for, good connections to the profession and industry
- good facilities and equipment

In their submissions, at their meetings with the chair, and via their representatives on the committee, students worried about unexplained changes at the VCAM - to courses, staff, administrative processes, and facilities while confronting increasing fees for accreditation

devalued by a diluted and demoralised VCAM experience. Such a harsh judgement was usually moderated by a sincere desire to be a constructive part of a world class institution.

Many students were indifferent to issues of organizational integration or the challenges of adjacent Schools, but cared about the impacts of cost cutting on their courses and teachers, and the imposition of dilutive breadth subjects.

The list of concerns was predictably long and the commentary varied by discipline. But the implications of such views were clear enough:

- in the absence of a sufficient budget, current teaching practices at the former VCA were too costly and possibly unsustainable
- but conventional cost cutting steps inevitably compromised the studio-based learning experience of all schools but especially as practised by the Schools of Art, Performing Arts, and Film and Television
- during the recent period of changes, internal communications were inadequate to the challenge of explaining the need and purpose of the changes for students, many staff, alumni, industry, and the professions
- growth in numbers through increased admissions or arrival of breadth students is a significant concern to aspiring elite artists
- the framework for breadth subjects along with the Centre for Ideas needs review for relevance
- solutions would need to be school-specific

The School of Music appears to have adopted the breadth subject formula within the MM with success and general student acceptance while offering appealing breadth options to the rest of the University population.

But for the MA schools, there is considerable room for challenging the applicability of both breadth commitments and the Centre for Ideas. In many cases the student cohort is a mature one with existing qualifications, and breadth options need to be developed which reinforce a student's artistic learning experience and are not seen to be needlessly dilutive of the training and practice commitment.

To that extent, the challenge ahead is different for the MA and the proposed Melbourne Conservatorium.

8. Confirmation of VCAM Vision

It is not the place of this Review to make the case for the important role of the arts in a civilized society - that is accepted.

Most institutions of the form of the VCAM include the following in their statement of purpose:

- identification and selection of the most artistically talented young people in the community
- the training of elite artists who are 'industry-ready' upon graduation
- anticipating, influencing, and meeting emerging needs of the arts industry and the professions
- the education and training of students so they may successfully pursue their individual creative aspirations but are prepared for other allied career paths
- producing informed arts graduates who contribute to the cultural life of the community and add a creative perspective to society's conversations
- the provision of well trained and educated teachers in the arts
- undertaking research in the arts

The Robinson Committee (1998) synthesized the then VCA mission in two points:

- to provide for the education, training and development of creative artists to the highest international levels, and
- to develop a community of artists, networked into the wider community

Some or all of these elements are found in the vision statements of the VCAM and within its Schools.

Individual schools place different emphases upon these elements. For example, the School of Music aims to

- nurture and develop a wide array of musical talents and competencies so that graduates are able to gain employment in the full range of occupations that require musical ability,
- foster excellence in the areas of artistic performance, research and scholarship, and
- promote informed interest in music and the performance of music within the university and wider community.

The School of Film and Television places a strong emphasis on innovative industry development in an international frame, stating it aims to:

- equip students with innovative audience-tested narrative skills applicable to both existing and new media, and
- produce works and alumni to further international perceptions of Australia as a critically reflective and outward looking nation.

The School of Art expresses its aspirations as follows:

- to nurture and develop a wide array of artistic talents and critical methodologies so that graduates are able to practice professionally either as artists or in the arts

profession, such as working in a curatorial role in museums, teaching, and providing creative content provision for areas of new and emerging digital technologies, including screen and interactive media;

- to foster excellence in the areas of artistic practice, research and scholarship;
- to promote an informed interest in contemporary art within the university and wider community;
- to be the locus for innovation and the production of new publicly experienced art work generated from the School and the artistic and scholarly community, both local and international.

These ambitions do not necessarily distinguish the VCAM from its peer organizations elsewhere in Australia. In the end, excellent execution is what matters.

But the emphasis upon an intense studio-based and performance oriented learning experience especially within the MA schools is special and needs to be maintained.

The School of Music has successfully followed a slightly different and more familiar path in its teaching and course framework and found a good fit within the Melbourne Model and has maintained its strength in pure and applied research.

Consideration of the MM and its 3+2 year degree structure has encouraged the VCAM to investigate its current curriculum structures and its balance between undergraduate, graduate and community outreach programs.

This work is ongoing and must be a priority. Arguments exist to evolve, for example, the Film and Television program into a postgraduate form and this may also apply to other Schools within the MA. There is some support for such an approach in the models adopted by some successful arts institutions abroad.

9. Financial Analysis and Funding

For the 2010 year, VCAM earned income is planned to be \$32.7m and this number has been steady over recent years.

The School of Music accounts for about 44% of these revenues.

In this period student enrolments have been steady at about the equivalent of 1600 full time students (EFTSL) with approximately 1270 core VCAM undergraduates.

Total direct expenditure is \$28m for salary and non salary costs, and total property charges are a further \$9m made up of a direct charge for space usage by the VCAM at Southbank and Parkville plus costs of utilities etc. These charges were consistent across University faculties and are judged to be reasonable.

The total value of the Southbank campus utilised by VCAM is currently \$117m for which rental charges last year were \$4.9m. The 2010 budgeted rental costs for the combined Southbank and Parkville properties is \$5.7m

The Economic Response Program together with the redundancy program of 2009 saw staffing levels fall by about 8%; otherwise VCAM staff turnover is generally low. The current permanent workforce is budgeted at 163 EFTs and casual workforce is estimated will be 90 EFTs.

Before the allocation of further overheads for administrative support and shared services and various other University levies, VCAM has an operating deficit (or negative gross margin) of around \$6m per year. In comparison, other University faculties are strongly positive at this line.

On a fully costed basis, the VCAM operating deficit is reported to be closer to \$20m annually. The path from -\$6m to -\$20m involves the application of a number of standard University overhead charges.

These numbers imply revenues of about \$19k per (blended) EFTSL with total costs near \$30k per EFTSL - normally a fatal combination.

Anecdotally, these imputed costs compare favourably with those found elsewhere in organizations with studio-based teaching methodologies such as NIDA, ANAM and AFTRS which, as accredited national institutes, benefit from a different funding model and therefore much higher commonwealth revenue allocations per student.

Within the VCAM faculty, the School of Music operates at near break even gross margin while benefitting from a generous legacy of bequests and trusts mostly tied to specific programs. With University allocations, this number also turns negative.

Arguments about cross subsidization within the VCAM faculty or University are unhelpful. But the fact remains that the strategies followed by all schools, which they argue convincingly are responsible for their various successes, are costly at the per student level.

Decisions to suspend courses in Music Theatre and Puppetry appear to have been logically informed by such financial analyses (along with other considerations such as cohort size and facility availability). On the other hand a persuasive argument may be made that academic decisions such as these require a broader consideration of community benefits and industry linkages which appear especially relevant in both these courses.

With the current funding framework, the VCAM is not financially viable on a standalone basis.

The School of Music is closest to financial sustainability but it too is dependent upon continuing University subsidies. Nevertheless, their specific operating approach, scale and early alignment with the Melbourne Model, make the case for continuing support of their strategy and for increased autonomy.

For the Schools of the MA, a review of operations and curriculum may lead to adoption of a more robust financial plan. Were increased funding available from the Research Training Scheme or Commonwealth Supported Places, then the development of full fee paying post graduate programs could be part of the solution.

A vibrant graduate program is consistent with the view of the schools within MA that the intellectual property associated with studio-based outcomes qualifies as research and contributes to the intellectual inventory of the parent University.

Still, the need for some level of ongoing financial support for all disciplines seems unavoidable - from the University, State and Federal governments, and industry.

At the same time, there remains much to improve within the VCAM schools - an especially tough task given that the student experience and educational outcomes have to improve in parallel.

Yet no appeal for increased financial support is credible without a demanding and coherent plan to drive efficiency and improved outcomes. And some runs on the board by the VCAM.

Lastly, a number of submissions argued for the development of an integrated cultural precinct at Southbank with the VCAM at its heart. Part of the reasoning was that better commercial use of real estate might provide financial returns which might benefit the VCAM.

The committee encourages further work along the lines of an arts hub and sees the VCAM as an integral member within such an environment. But the developments of possible concepts fell outside the committee's work program and implementation horizons. No matter how any infrastructure plan evolves, the financial challenges to the VCAM require more near term actions.

Also as a point of principle, it is generally imprudent to contemplate funding operating deficits through asset dispositions, as some have suggested. Reinvesting the proceeds of asset sales in relevant new facilities does hold appeal, however.

10. The Structural Question

There are fundamentally two questions relating to structure: 1) can the merger between the VCA and the University of Melbourne be made to work, and 2) should the pedagogically different Schools of Art, Film and Television, and Performing Arts stay integrated with the School of Music which is already well down the path to effective combination of Southbank and Parkville operations and well aligned with the MM.

The answer to 1) is Absolutely, Yes, and to 2) a version of 'one faculty, two systems', or 'together but separate' model.

A number of alternatives were discussed and most could be made to work given sufficient time, goodwill and motivation.

There is probably no one ideal organizational academic architecture for the arts, and examples could be found around the world of most options that advocates suggested.

Given the decades long history of association between the former VCA and the University, it is important to acknowledge the consistency of the support, financial and academic, from the University which has enabled the former VCA to operate as well as it has.

The committee formed the view that the former VCA and the Faculty of Music should continue as a single faculty and remain part of the University. Justifications for alternative models simply offered too few advantages or were based upon unrealistic (usually financial) assumptions to recommend departure from the current path.

It was accepted that the vision of the School of Music, the drivers of its success, and the options it had from its scale and the mainstream nature of music, supported increased autonomy within the proposed faculty.

It was also accepted that the Schools of Art, Film and TV, and Performing Arts, on the one hand, and the School of Music, on the other, are at different stages of curriculum review and development and possess academic missions that differ markedly in their current diversity. They presently face separate budgetary challenges and opportunities. It followed that greater autonomy for the two discipline groupings would allow each to address their specific challenges more effectively.

The preferred structure which emerged involved two divisions each headed by a Director and reporting to a faculty Head. One would include the Schools of Art, Performing Arts, and Film and Television (MA), the other the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music made up of the Southbank and Parkville music programs.

In this case, the faculty superstructure would provide certain shared administrative services and its Head would represent the faculty as required by the University.

This proposal envisages a highly decentralised faculty organization whose elements are very focused upon the specific, often different, needs of its students and various stakeholders such as industry.

Devolving decision making for budgets, staffing and curricula to the proposed Directors of the Conservatorium and MA is recommended.

This structure with its devolution of authority is forward looking. There is a realistic chance that the VCAM could, given progressive leadership, encouragement and flexibility by the University, and moderate additional funds from State and Federal sources, transform into a best-in-class arts institution and a reference standard for artistic excellence nationally.

11. Next steps

The findings of this review present the University with a number of decisions which flow from answers to the following:

- Is a potentially best-in-class performing and visual arts institution a legitimate part of the University's vision and faculty portfolio in 2010 and beyond?
- Does the University have an appetite and capacity to continue financial support of the MA - to maintain current performance levels - or increase the investment to help achieve the stated goal of artistic vibrancy and educational excellence?
- Should the University encourage MA and the Conservatorium to seek additional revenues through initiatives which respond to community interests in continuing education and in-service training?
- Might the VCAM be a legitimate bookend of the spectrum of MM structures where flexibility in course and breadth subject design is greatest?
- Will the University agree to a transformational journey which may take a decade to implement successfully?
- Is there a signature role for VCAM in an ambitious development of the Southbank arts precinct?

This Review recommends that the University answers these questions affirmatively and enthusiastically.