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Edmunds joins Pretty in VCA exodus

by [Andrew Crook \(http://www.crikey.com.au/author/andrewcrook2/\)](http://www.crikey.com.au/author/andrewcrook2/)

The shake-up at the Victorian College of the Arts has claimed another victim, with high-profile Deputy Dean Kristy Edmunds announcing her resignation to pursue other interests after just nine months in the role.

In an email sent to faculty staff this morning, and obtained by *Crikey*, Professor Edmunds, also head of performing arts, says the recent changes to organisation's structure, involving "new responsibilities, workloads and particular expertise," had prevailed upon her decision to jump ship.

The move comes just weeks after controversial Dean Sharman Pretty quit in the wake of the university's decision to suspend the controversial Melbourne Model and split the institution into two arms under a common umbrella. The United States-educated Edmunds was regarded as a fellow traveller in Pretty's quest to force through the paring-back of practical instruction.

Experienced hand Geraldine Cook will take over as head of performing arts and Edmunds' deputy dean duties will be assumed by respected VCA Director Su Baker and Acting Dean Warren Bebbington. The new structure at the VCA involves a music conservatorium headed by Gary McPherson and a Southbank campus overseen by Baker. The University is currently conducting a global search for a new dean.

Edmunds served as the Melbourne Festival's creative svengali for three years before joining the VCA in November 2008. She was appointed as Deputy Dean on January 1 this year and also served on the University's controversial review committee headed by former Telstra chief Ziggy Switkowski to probe the institution's future.

Edmunds says a consultancy that she holds at New York's prestigious Park Avenue Armory had begun to take up more of her time.

"As you all know there have been numerous changes underway since the start of this Semester (to put it mildly)," Edmunds wrote.

"While the balance of my responsibilities and commitments has been relatively manageable so far, the requirements of both are increasing at a clipping pace and I have necessarily had to take stock and make some pretty major decisions.

Edmunds says the past 20 months since her arrival has been "quite a ride".

"Throughout it all, I have been grateful for your individual and collective commitments in ensuring the heart and soul of what you do here is generously offered and professionally delivered. I direct this gratitude to all of you in each discipline, across any number of buildings, as academics, as professional staff and to all of the sessional artists/creatives. It is the combined efforts of everyone that makes the School, and I thank you."

She likens her departure to Jason Akermanis' recent sacking from the Western Bulldogs, paraphrasing Rodney Eade's recent pronouncement in the wake of the champion half-forward's exit from the club that "when you take your hand out of the water there is no hole".

Save VCA head Scott Dawkins commended the move, claiming Edmunds' appointment had divided the arts community.

"Kristy did divide people, obviously we weren't impressed that she was pro-merger and we weren't impressed that the Save VCA campaign was fobbed off. The big thing now is that Geraldine and Su are very well respected and should do a good job."

Last September, Edmunds gave [widely-derided \(http://www.theage.com.au/national/arts-head-says-give-merger-a-chance-20090902-f8ff.html\)](http://www.theage.com.au/national/arts-head-says-give-merger-a-chance-20090902-f8ff.html) interview to *The Age* in which she described the debate around the college as driven by a "strange hysteria".

A spokesperson for the University cited increasing responsibilities and time commitments involving the Park Avenue Armory and independent research projects for Edmunds' "difficult" decision to stand down.

Since the release of the University's review last month, political parties have scrambled to announce recurrent funding to save the institution. Labor's candidate for Melbourne, Cath Bowtell, has pledged \$5.1 million in extra annual federal funding with the Victorian opposition and the Greens each promising \$6 million. While the University continues to cross-subsidise the VCA to the tune of about \$6 million, the VCA is still forced to pay back around \$10 million in "rent" and administrative costs, leaving a shortfall of around \$7 million.

A number of other staff have also left the VCA over the last year. This morning on Facebook, former federal MP Race Mathews called on the University to offer reinstatement to those who resigned or were forced out during the turmoil.

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