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Higher Education

VCA draws up single degree

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MELBOURNE University has supported a curriculum review at the Victorian College of the Arts that dumps key elements of the Melbourne Model.

This includes compulsory breadth and the idea of students undertaking broad studies before specialising.

But the proposed bachelor of fine arts does echo the Melbourne Model's five-year bachelor-masters degree structure by offering a fourth-year honours that can lead into a fifth-year masters.

It is proposed students will study theoretical "contextual" subjects, but they will be related to their chosen discipline and delivered by the particular school. They will also have the option of taking subjects outside their discipline or even outside the faculty.

"The recommendations are that a degree structure be developed that honours the principles of intensive studio practice, but is also designed to meet the needs of the 21st century, technologically, intellectually and artistically," VCA director Su Baker said.

Professor Baker said the principle of the Melbourne Model, in as far as it is based on students specialising later, doesn't apply to the VCA. "That can't happen with us," she said.

She said the big fear of students during last year's dispute over the implementation of the Melbourne Model had been that breadth requirements would stop them from practising and studying what they really wanted. "They were right to object," she said, adding VCA students come into programs already committed to their chosen disciplines.

The proposed bachelor of fine arts would be offered in at least eight different majors under the working titles of art, contemporary music, film and television, animation, theatre, dance, production and musical theatre.

Having a single uniform degree should make it easier for students to mix and match subjects and disciplines as their studies and interests develop, Professor Baker said.

It is proposed that the VCA's Centre of Ideas will focus on postgraduate units and research degrees.

The review also proposes a production-focused two-year associate degree that can count towards a three-year bachelors if students choose to stay on.

Professor Baker said the curriculum, which will be implemented in 2012, will go through a design and consultation phase over the next three to four months.

The review paper, which was presented to and supported by the university late last year, said its aim is to "provide a much more robust preparation for graduates in the arts, who face a future characterised by a portfolio career, as well as a stronger array of pathways for VCA graduates seeking further study."

It said the course should be distinctive for its "individualised studio-based teaching which is immersive and

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