

NTEU SUBMISSION

Defining the Future for the VCA and Music at The University of Melbourne

Introduction

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the University of Melbourne's review of the future of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music (VCAM) at the University. NTEU represents academics and professional staff at the University of Melbourne, including in the Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music.

Higher Education Arts Education in Victoria

The Victorian College of Arts has a long and distinguished history and has been offering its unique brand of arts education to Victorians since 1867. Formerly affiliated with the University of Melbourne, in April 2009 the VCA was amalgamated with the University, creating The Victorian College of the Arts and Music (VCAM). It was intended that the VCAM would carry on the traditions of the VCA, providing Victoria's premier arts training in the areas of Art, Dance, Drama, Film and Television, Music and Production, with the Heads of Agreement signed by the VCA and the University of Melbourne upon the merger specifically noting the unique and important status of the VCA and its programs¹:

Vision and purpose of integration

The vision and purpose of the integration as reflected in the Heads of Agreement is to strengthen the overall provision of training and education in the visual and performing arts in Victoria and Australia.(pg 1)

It is worth noting in this context that many of the terms of the Agreement specifically referred to the pre-eminence of the VCA's programs and its pivotal role in arts education nationally and internationally, with various clauses describing the integration as:

- *bringing into the University the international reputation and distinctive pedagogy of the VCA;(pg 7)*
- *providing within the University a secure, certain and sustainable framework that will enable the VCA to expand and enhance its role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education; (pg 7)*
- *the status, uniqueness and reputation of the VCA and its statutory objects, strategic purpose, vision and educational programs are to be recognised; (pg 8)*
- *the VCA is to retain its title and logo (pentagram representing the five senses intertwined) for the purposes of branding, publicity and marketing of the VCA as a distinct entity and its programs both in Australia and internationally; (pg 8)*

The cultural dividends brought by VCA, and now the VCAM, are considerable. The VCAM is responsible for supplying highly skilled artists across a breadth of disciplines and been

¹ *Conformed Copy as Amended of Heads of Agreement in respect of the Integration of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) and the University of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, April 2009. Source <http://savevca.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Heads-of-Agreement.pdf>*

integral in continuing the VCA tradition of ensuring the reputation of Melbourne as being the arts and cultural capital of Australia.

Given the important national status of the VCAM, NTEU is concerned that proposed changes to the VCAM curriculum outlined in the Discussion Paper, coupled with the University's urgency in fully integrating the VCA programs into the Melbourne Model, will undermine VCAM's capacity to attract Victoria's and Australia's finest young artists. In short we believe that any changes that would significantly dilute existing VCA programs would be counter-productive and not achieve the primary purpose of arts education, which the Discussion Paper defines as:²

The primary purpose of higher education in the arts is to prepare artists to enter arts professions and to support continuing education of professional artists.(p 9)

Based on negative reaction to the proposal from the arts community, the public and community leaders, there is absolutely no doubt that the proposed changes do not reflect the needs or wishes of staff, students and the broader Arts community.

The NTEU's major concerns include:

- 1. The primacy of the multi-disciplinary focus of the VCAM curriculum may be undermined as a result of the introduction of the Melbourne Model;**
- 2. The integrity of the VCAM as a specialist teaching institution may be under threat due to a failure of the University of Melbourne to uphold undertakings made in the 2006 Heads of Agreement (see below).**
- 3. Substantial changes are being made to individual course offerings without extensive consultation with students or the Arts community; and**
- 4. Funding constraints are threatening VCAM's ability to provide high quality vocational and specialist training.**
- 5. The rigid implementation of the University's funding model does not take into account the unique needs of the VCAM.**

Changes to the VCAM curriculum and Alignment with the Melbourne Model

In order to maintain its high quality teaching and learning objectives, the VCAM requires its students to undergo extremely rigorous and demanding training programs. While NTEU is not suggesting that the VCA programs should be totally divorced from the Melbourne Model, the Model must be introduced in a manner consistent with the pedagogical goals of VCA.

As such, NTEU is concerned that the new undergraduate degree, which will be comprised of electives from across the university as part of the Melbourne Models 'breadth' objectives, may dilute the specialist training components that are fundamental to VCAM programs. We are also concerned with suggestions that the schools of Dance, Drama, Film and Television, Music, Production and the Visual Arts programs should offer generalised University of Melbourne creative arts degrees, similar to those available from a large number of other universities. Such a move may reduce the appeal of University's creative arts programs and see aspiring young artists seeking entry into other specialised institutions such as NIDA or WAAPA.

The NTEU has also heard deep concern expressed by VCAM staff about the shortening of semester to fit the standardised University semester. Such shortening of teaching times will reduce the quality of in depth, personal training and rehearsal times available to future

² *Defining the Future for the VCA and Music at The University of Melbourne; A Discussion Paper*
University of Melbourne, November 2009. Source:
http://vcam.unimelb.edu.au/discussion/downloads/4089_OFFVC_DiscussionPaperVCAM_foremail2.pdf

students. There are also questions of whether shortened semesters for VCAM subjects will meet the professional standards previously expected by many sectors of the arts industry of VCAM graduates.

NTEU also considers these changes to be contrary to the undertakings given by the University when the VCA was fully integrated in 2007.

Undertakings made in the 2006 Heads of Agreement.

The *Melbourne University (Victoria College of the Arts) Act 2006* was passed because Parliament recognised the important role VCA plays in the State.

“This bill ensures that future generations of Victorian artists will continue to benefit from the high-quality teaching programs which are offered by the Victorian College of the Arts.” (Ms BARKER, Oakleigh, Hansard, 22 August 2006, p2667-2900)

“If we are going to talk about the importance of the arts, as we do from time to time in this house when we say how proud we are of the arts in Melbourne, then I think it behoves the government of the day to follow that up with some funding. It was not a huge amount of money that would have been required to fill the gap to allow the Victorian College of the Arts to continue as it was, as essentially a separate entity down in Southbank.” (Mr MAUGHAN, Rodney, 22 August 2006, p2667-2900)

“It is important that the staff and students are comfortable with and will not be disadvantaged by the change.” (Mr DIXON, Nepean, 22 August 2006, p2667-2900)

“As can be seen, it is a bill that is supported by all sides of the house. Every member has spoken quite glowingly of the role that the Victorian College of the Arts plays in developing and nurturing young talent in the state.” (Ms ALLAN, Minister for Education Services, 22 August 2006, p2667-2900)

The bill was debated on the premise that a ***Heads of Agreement*** between VCA and the University reflected the way the integration would take place. NTEU believes that the current proposals have the danger of breaching (or already have breached) a number of undertakings contained in the Heads of Agreement, and in particular:

1. Both parties agree that one of the core objectives of the integration is to maintain and over time to **strengthen the funding** available for the VCA’s educational activities.
2. In the fifth year of the integration, a review is to be held to determine whether it is feasible to align VCA’s funding more closely with other University faculties **“without compromise to the ongoing viability of the VCA or the funding of its educational programs.”**
3. The benefit of bringing into the University the **international reputation and distinctive pedagogy** of the VCA;
 - a) VCA logo and branding identity is to be retained. (NTEU notes that the VCA logo and branding were removed from stationery and the website in April 2009.)
 - b) **The distinctive VCA pedagogy is to be retained.**
4. The **vibrant VCA graduation ceremony** where each school performs to **remain**.

Melbourne University Funding Model

Despite the commitment in the Heads of Agreement that in the fifth year (which will be in 2012) 'a review is to be held to determine whether it is feasible to align VCA's funding more closely with other University faculties', it is apparent from the University's 2008 Annual Budget that this 'alignment' is already taking place. The 2008 Budget shows that the internal process that applies to the distribution of University income to the faculties, through the Budget and Planning Committee (PCB), has also been applied to the VCA.

Without going into all of the complexities the University's funding model, the NTEU believes that adoption of this model to the VCA does not present a fair representation of VCA's financial situation with respect to its aims and objectives. One component of the funding model where this is made very clear is in respect to the 'charge' the University imposes on each faculty as a contribution to the **overheads and other initiatives**. Despite the name of this charge inferring that it is primarily used to cover the central costs associated with the repair and maintenance of building and grounds, the total quantum required to undertake such activities (in order of \$80m for the whole university) is only a fraction of the total collected (in order of \$800m) and that it used to provide resources to the university to support other initiatives including performance based funding and also for capital and investment purposes. The NTEU is recommending that this charge be divided into a 'repair and maintenance overhead component' and a 'other initiatives' component to allow more a more accurate reflection of real costs.

University Budget figures show the VCA (as distinct from the Music Faculty which is treated separately in the Budget) was 'charged' at rate of 83.3% of distributed income in 2009 (see table 1 below) while the average for all Faculties was 46.2%. For the VCA this increased from 63.9% in 2007 and is forecast to rise again to 84.5% in 2010. Over the same period the average charge for all faculties declined marginally from 47.5% to 46.4%. Prior to integration (in 2006) the VCA's administration costs were \$11.7m or 47% of revenue. On integration in 2007, many functions moved to the University and VCA costs were reduced to \$6.3m (see the *Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts Business Plan 2008-2012*, section 6.1). However, this \$5.4m reduction in administrative costs for the VCA was more than offset by the \$9.2m overheads and initiatives imposed in 2007.

There are several reasons why the University of Melbourne funding model does not give a true reflection of the true financial position of the VCA. The high overheads and initiatives charges seem to be largely driven by the so called 'space driver' used in the allocation of these charges across faculties. The reality however is that the VCA needs space. Teaching practical arts requires studios for dancing, rehearsing, filming or assembling an orchestra, and spaces where artists and sculptors can work and production designers can assemble theatre sets. If the overheads and initiatives charge was only related to the cost of maintaining and repairing this space, then there might be some logic to this formulation. However, given that it is also used to fund other initiatives, including capital and investment funds, then it would not be unfair to say that the VCA and its students are making a larger proportional contribution to the University's future capital investment than other faculties. This is especially problematic given that on incorporation, the University's capital portfolio was boosted by in excess of \$100m in assets from the VCA.

University of Melbourne Annual Budget 2008 (A1 Faculty Allocations p36)

VCA	2007	2008	2009	2010
Income from PCB	14.4	16.4	17.3	18.1
Overheads + Initiatives	-9.2	-11.8	-14.4	-15.3
<i>Overhead & Initiatives (%)</i>	<i>63.9%</i>	<i>72.0%</i>	<i>83.2%</i>	<i>84.5%</i>

All Faculties	2007	2008	2009	2010
Income from PCB	689.6	756.4	794.3	826.2
Overheads + Initiatives	-327.4	-356.6	-366.9	-383.6
<i>Overhead & Initiatives (%)</i>	<i>47.5%</i>	<i>47.1%</i>	<i>46.2%</i>	<i>46.4%</i>

In the existing Budget papers the VCA's financial sustainability is only assured by a so called adjustment payment which has been labelled a VCA subsidy. This is an unfortunate choice of terms because it clearly infers that the VCA is being highly cross subsidised by the rest of the university. For the reasons outlined above, NTEU does not accept that this is necessarily the case, and the extent of any subsidisation required is a construct of the University Funding model more than it is an accurate reflection of VCA's true financial position.

The NTEU also accepts that, in the long run, it will be almost impossible for VCA to continue to offer the types of programs that it does on the basis of the funding cluster rates it receives for creative arts students as part of the Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS) for universities. We do not, however necessarily agree that the only way of the VCA having any possibility of receiving fund at rate similar to NIDA for example is for the VCA to be operated as a separate entity.

The NTEU believes that the best approach is for the Review Committee to recommend that the State and Commonwealth Ministers for Arts, Mr Peter Garret and Mr Peter Batchelor, introduce a practicum loading (in order of \$15,000) be paid to the University per VCA enrolled student (noting that the loading would apply to those students who are exclusively enrolled in the VCA programs within the VCAM). The additional funding would be delivered under a funding compact to ensure that the VCAM received the full benefit of the funding boost.

Such a measure would be marginal, costing Government (at current levels of enrolment) less than \$15 million per annum. Furthermore, given the cultural value that VCAM generates adding to Victoria's reputation as the foci for Arts in Australia, it is reasonable that both the State and Federal Governments contribute in some measure of support in meeting this loading.

It is only with the injection of additional funds (via the suggested loading or similar) that the VCA will able to continue to offer the types of programs for which it is well renowned. The alternative proposed by the University, which involves complete absorption into the University and broad integration into the Melbourne Model, is likely to only succeed in diminishing the success of the VCA as one of the pre-eminent college of arts in the country, and reduce its ability to enhance the artistic and academic reputation of the University.

Recommendations:

- 1. The Victorian State and Commonwealth Governments, through the respective Ministers for Arts, be applied to for State and Commonwealth support for the VCA via a practicum loading (in order of \$15,000), to be paid University per VCA enrolled student.**
- 2. The University of Melbourne's "charge" rate to the VCA is bought into line with the average for the rest of the University's departments and centres. Furthermore, that the so called adjustment payment, labelled as the VCA subsidy, be redefined to more accurately reflect the true financial position of the VCA.**

- 3. The University of Melbourne honour the terms of the 2006 Heads of Agreement, including the retention of the VCA logo and branding on all VCA related documentation and publications.**
- 4. The distinctive pedagogy and international reputation of the VCA's programs are retained, and that any integration into the Melbourne Model does not dilute integral specialist training components.**
- 5. The programs offered within the VCA schools of Dance, Drama, Film and Television, Music, Production and the Visual Arts should be exclusive to the VCAM and not be diluted or amended to create a generalist creative arts degree.**
- 6. The VCA continue as the Faculty of the VCA and Music with the additional funding in recommendation one. Alternatively, that serious consideration be given to the creation of a new National arts body incorporating the VCA and receiving necessary funding from the Commonwealth Government. Alternatively, that the Review Committee consider recommending structural separation between the VCA and the University of Melbourne (and the former Faculty of Music), with additional funding as in recommendation 1.**