



VICTORIAN COLLEGE  
OF THE ARTS

12 February 2010

SAVE VCA  
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The VCAM Review Committee  
C/- University of Melbourne

By email: [vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au)

**Re: Discussion Paper**

Thank you for this opportunity to publicly respond to the University of Melbourne's (UoM) Discussion Paper *Defining the Future for the VCA and Music at the University of Melbourne*.

The format of this submission follows the issues raised in the Discussion Paper. It gives a background to SAVE VCA and makes recommendations for both the Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne Music. Preliminary views on the Review process are also provided.

An extensive set of Appendices gives easy access to the research material on which this submission is based.

Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of SAVE VCA

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**WWW.SAVEVCA.ORG**

## **THE REVIEW PROCESS**

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SAVE VCA has serious concerns about the validity and independence of the Review process.

On 05/01/10 SAVE VCA submitted a range of questions to the Chairperson (Appendix A) regarding the Discussion Paper process including the timing of the Review, transparency, scope, omissions of key information and basic queries, e.g. why does Music Theatre appear in Curriculum Alternatives Option 1 but not Option 2?

On 19/01/10 the Acting Vice-Chancellor John Dewar responded to two of the queries raised out of four pages of questions (Appendix B). No response was received for the remainder so at this time the concerns raised are still outstanding and are still valid concerns.

The 05/02/10 release of Review Committee membership poses even greater concerns. As outlined to the Chairperson on 08/02/09 (Appendix C), SAVE VCA believes the Review process is seriously compromised by the fact only 2 out of 9 staff and student committee members were elected to their position.

VCAM Dean Sharman Pretty and Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis have appointed four VCAM Heads of School to the Committee, one of which is Prof. Kristy Edmunds who also holds the role of Deputy Dean. Three of these Heads of School have little or no experience of the former Victorian College of the Arts (hereafter referred to as VCA) pre-merger, and to varying degrees have been publicly supportive of the Melbourne Model and the merger. Subjectivity aside, all four Heads of School hold positions of authority in the Faculty. SAVE VCA is concerned that submitters are constrained in providing frank and informed views out of a real or perceived threat of repercussions in their work and study life.

- 1.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson should replace the 7 unelected staff and student representatives with those directly elected by the current VCAM staff and students. Appointments should be made from a selection of volunteer candidates as opposed to the Dean and Vice Chancellor choosing the candidates. This simply brings these 7 roles in line with the democratic appointment process afforded the Parkville representative. The Chairperson should also consider adding an alumni representative to the panel.

Democratic election of panel members will reassure the SAVE VCA membership that the Review is transparent and that any outcomes are likely to be well-founded, informed and credible.

## ABOUT SAVE VCA

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In the document *Information for Arts & Cultural Tourism Industry* that SAVE VCA produced in November 2009 (Appendix D), three events were outlined. These occurring in close succession produced the SAVE VCA movement:

- **The Dean's VCA:** Before formally meeting with staff and students, the new VCAM Dean Sharman Pretty gave an interview to *The Age*<sup>1</sup>, which outlined that VCA courses would be converted to the Melbourne Model and that \$11m would be stripped from the budget. The Dean later gave an interview to *The Australian* where she described VCA as “siload,” and holding onto specialist education, which was in the Dean's opinion, a “very old view”.<sup>2</sup>
- **Staff Cuts:** Without notice, twelve casual professional staff lost their jobs, others were moved to different employment agreements and a hiring freeze was implemented.<sup>3</sup>
- **Courses Cut:** Again without notice, VCA Puppetry and Music Theatre were “suspended”<sup>4</sup>. The Puppetry course was the only one of its kind in Australia. The Music Theatre degree course was only in its first year (after six painstaking years of lobbying to get the Music Theatre Foundation program converted to a degree offering). The staff and students of both courses weren't notified until the suspensions had been implemented.

The collective and publicly expressed concerns saw a student protest movement merge with a similar staff movement. This was quickly joined by alumni, working industry professionals, arts businesses, ex-politicians, media and philanthropists. The organic end result was SAVE VCA.

SAVE VCA continues to enjoy support from the National Tertiary Education Union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and relies on donors for everything from printing to legal advice.

The name “SAVE VCA” came into being in April 2009 when students from the Film and Television school set up a website (savevca.org). In May, a Production student set up a Facebook fan page and as of today, SAVE VCA has exactly 13,267 Facebook members. The website has had three incarnations, with the latest version attracting an average of 612 unique views per day. The now highly recognizable SAVE VCA logo was born on 02/08/09.

At present SAVE VCA is managed by a core group of thirty staff, students, ex-staff, graduates, arts professionals, union representatives, and a professional lobbyist. All are volunteers. SAVE VCA has three key daily focuses:

- **Information:** SAVE VCA is committed to the free flow of information. In lieu of active, accurate and transparent communication from VCAM and University Management regarding the College, SAVE VCA has become an unofficial conduit of information going in and out of VCA. SAVE VCA only deals in information that can be verified.
- **Watchdog:** SAVE VCA is committed to the full implementation of the merger Heads of Agreement (Appendix E). SAVE VCA has become an unofficial source of information about the various failures in implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Age 12/04/09 “Pretty Well Rehearsed In Reshaping The Arts”

<sup>2</sup> The Australian 05/06/09 “Campus Revolution Aims At Producing All-Rounders”

<sup>3</sup> Crikey.com 06/05/09 “Questions Hang Over The VCA's Future”

<sup>4</sup> The Age 21/05/09 “Staff, Students At Former VCA In Crisis Meetings”

- **Representation:** SAVE VCA is committed to working for a strong and viable VCA and continues to do so following unsuccessful attempts to work amicably with the UoM. SAVE VCA has successfully represented to Government and to the private sector the need to better VCA's financial prospects and to give the College greater autonomy from the University. This action is ongoing and SAVE VCA is very willing to work with any renewed representations recommended by the Review Committee to shore up VCA's future, particularly in the pursuit of Arts Ministry funding and an independent VCA.

There is a reason why so many people give their time every day to staff SAVE VCA. Some teach there, some learn there, some went there, some rely on the College to supply graduates for businesses, some admire the standards of excellence and achievement for Victoria represented by the alumni from the College and some just enjoy going to see a show there.

**But all genuinely love the Victorian College of the Arts.**

2. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson should seek the implementation of clear and enforceable benchmarks for any new funding, curriculum or branding requirements of the University (or any other body the Review Committee recommends should manage VCA) with defined public reporting procedures; as well as ongoing monitoring and active involvement from the Federal and State Education and Arts Ministers in this next period of VCA's evolution.

## WHY SAVE VCA?

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SAVE VCA believes that VCA is a crucible for Australia's new artisans - professionals that not only entertain but add to the Australian culture and fuel arts business. As such it must be cherished and protected by a strong sense of care and stewardship and this had largely been the case since its inception.

The VCA had established an enviable reputation as an elite arts training institution on both the national and international stage. This reputation was largely due to its dedicated focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training at both Undergraduate and Post Graduate levels and the subsequent successes of its alumni.

The nature of this institution was unique within Australia; being **the only single body in Tertiary Education that contained all of the performing arts disciplines**. These included production-based Schools of Art, Dance, Drama, Music (including Music Theatre), Production (including Puppetry) and Film & Television under the umbrella of a single organisation. Each school had curricula founded on a strong body of practice underpinned with specific discipline-based theory. The undergraduate degrees were further enhanced by a range of artist-based "breadth" subjects offered through the Centre for Ideas.

Financial difficulties that resulted from the removal of specialist Federal cluster funding culminated in the VCA becoming a Faculty of the University of Melbourne on 1 January 2007 – this covered by a "Heads of Agreement" (Appendix E) that stated the intent to maintain the specialist nature of education and training that had been so successful across all disciplines at the VCA.

Further structural changes occurred in 2009 when the Faculty of the VCA (Southbank) was combined with the Faculty of Music (Parkville) to form the Faculty of the VCA and Music. The realisation of this new Faculty in 2009, under the new Dean, saw proposals of major changes that threatened the unique qualities and strength of the VCA.

These changes appeared to be based on the idea that there was a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model, whilst simultaneously needing to make VCA run at a lower cost.

SAVE VCA considers that there is a myth around the 'breadth' of subjects provided to students. Dedication or specialisation does not mean narrowness. In fact the Centre for Ideas programme introduced into the Undergraduate stream in 2001 as part of a major curriculum review across the VCA, provided breadth subject study outside of the specific discipline. The focus was on introducing participants to key ideas of theory that have been influential in modern culture. The CFI load is 12.5% of an undergraduate student's load vs. 25% "breadth" for the Melbourne Model. SAVE VCA supports ongoing curriculum reviews of CFI, particularly as anecdotal student feedback suggests the current content needs to be realigned more closely back to the various VCA disciplines.

In addition, VCA undergraduate students are selected by the system of talent- based entry (audition, portfolio and interview) and are focussed on their chosen field (Dance, Music, Drama, etc.) in a manner different to most students who apply to University courses through VTAC. It is uncommon within VCA for an Undergraduate student to withdraw from study as a result of a realisation that they have chosen the wrong course.

By the time they come to VCA, many students have been intensely studying their disciplines for years - either within the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, other secondary schools or even at tertiary level. They are well equipped to determine choice of curriculum.

3. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recognise maintaining VCA's multidisciplinary teaching environment as a requirement of all future curricula, funding and staffing decisions. In addition, curricula should be guided by the expressed needs of students and their future employers.

### **IMPACT OF RECENT CHANGES TO VCA**

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SAVE VCA understands that the proposed combination of budget cutbacks, reduction in semester lengths and introduction of a single New Generation Degree to cover all disciplines within the VCA is already threatening both the reputation and nature of training that underpinned the enviable reputation of the VCA.

SAVE VCA members drawing on experience in the arts industry know that any move away from intensive, studio-based training in defined areas of specialisation threatens the ability of VCA graduates to compete with those of other Australian schools like NIDA and WAAPA (let alone international schools), and makes VCA graduates less work-ready. This in turn impacts upon the arts industry by causing a decline in the availability of Victorian-based graduate artisans with the skills required to enter the workforce.

SAVE VCA believes that the change in culture from what was Australia's leading arts training institution with recognised world's best practice at many levels, to a University Faculty based principally around a generic Melbourne Model degree, will impact negatively upon both application numbers, quality and graduate success in the arts sector within State and at a national and international level.

4. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson carefully consider the impact of any recommendations on the broader reputation of VCA in Australia and overseas; and that short-term actions be considered to forestall any further damage to the reputation of the VCA.

## VCA AS A PROVIDER TO ARTS BUSINESS

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*It's not just about theatre. It's not just about 'the arts'. It's about the hotels that are booked out every night because people are going to Jersey Boys and Wicked and everything else that comes to this town. It's about the people who work in those hotels. It's about the restaurants. It's about the food producers who produce food for those restaurants. It's an economy!"*

Heidi Victoria MP at SAVE VCA WEEK Rally 21/08/09

VCA has trained artists that work across the entire arts spectrum. Between them they have generated literally millions and millions of dollars for the Victorian economy and for Australia. The arts are a business and VCA is a vital conduit in its economic viability. SAVE VCA believes that this is being threatened by the potential loss of graduate quality (lack of intensive training) and numbers (courses being cut reducing graduate availability).

Some examples of the economic benefits of the arts to Victoria and Australia which are now under threat include:

- The Live Entertainment and Film and Television industries combined are worth at least \$3 billion nationally.
- The Live Performance Australia Ticket Attendance and Revenue Survey<sup>5</sup> showed admissions in the live entertainment sector were worth at least \$1 billion in 2008. The largest revenue generating areas were:
  - contemporary music (37%)
  - music theatre (24%)
  - classical music (10%) and
  - theatre (8%)
- Some 2,492 businesses in the Australian film and video production and post-production services industry generated an overall income of \$2.028 billion in 2006/07<sup>6</sup>.
- Attendance at art exhibitions is flourishing, with the Salvador Dali exhibition in 2009 attracting 330,000 visitors<sup>7</sup>.
- The main performing arts companies in Melbourne have a combined subscription base of almost 45,000 people<sup>8</sup>
- A single musical (Wicked) brought into Victorian \$126m in a mere 13 months.<sup>9</sup>

While SAVE VCA has never advocated that VCA curriculum should be freeze-framed in its pre-merger form, there is no denying the core training values of providing intensive, studio training in specialist fields has had enormous success. A small selection of notable examples of the beneficial economic impact for Victoria and Australia of the work of VCA alumni are detailed overleaf.

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5 Live Performance Australia Ticket Attendance and Revenue Survey -media release 27/7/09

6 Get The Picture 2008, Screen Australia - quoting ABS Survey

7 The Australian - 22/10/09

8 27/10/09 The Age "Under The Spotlight"

9 30/11/09 ABC News Online "Wicked Boost Vic Economy"

### **School of Film & Television**

- 52% of the Victorian drama and documentary production industry in the past four years have been written, produced or directed by VCA alumni. These are the key creatives who usually generate the project and determine where it will be filmed. Film Victoria confirmed that the value of this percentage of production is at least \$214 million.

### **School of Drama**

Alumni work throughout the Australian industry and a sample are:

- Andrew Upton - Co Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company
- Vince Colosimo - Underbelly, Wog Boy, Secret Life of Us, Chopper
- Julia Zemiro - Rockwiz, Thank God You're Here

### **School of Music**

- Graduates of the Music Theatre Foundation Course have been cast in prominent works such as Wicked, The Lion King, High School Musical and Mary Poppins. Music Theatre was suspended by the University of Melbourne in 2009.
- Alumni in the contemporary music area include members of internationally renowned John Butler Trio and The Cat Empire.
- Over 10% of all members of professional orchestras in Australia are VCA alumni. The MSO has 19 alumni being 20% of the orchestra and Orchestra Victoria has 14 alumni being 23%.

### **School of Production**

- At the time of submitting this document, Production graduates were employed in prominent roles all around Australia including Sydney Theatre Company, Victorian Opera, The Australian Ballet, Jersey Boys, Mary Poppins, The Border Project, and Melbourne Theatre Company. Production graduates also work internationally. For instance, the current ASM for The Lion King West End is an Australian VCA alumnus.
- Director of Melbourne-based Creature Technology Company, which developed the puppetry for the mega-hit "Walking with Dinosaurs", confirmed in The Age that the company has 14 VCA graduates on staff<sup>10</sup> and expects to employ 60 people on its "King Kong" project in 2010. They stated "the company's future in Melbourne and Australia was "potentially capped" by the lack of talented creative staff it could draw on". Puppetry was suspended by the University of Melbourne in 2009<sup>11</sup>.

### **School of Dance**

- Dance alumni work in most major companies in Australia and internationally including Hong Kong Ballet and Frankfurt Ballet.
- Dance students have been particularly successful in creating their own companies such as Kate Denborough and Gerard van Dyck (Assoc. Artistic Directors Kage Physical Theatre).

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<sup>11</sup> 19/09/09 The Age "High Wired And Handsome Kong Rises in Melbourne"

**School of Art**

- Since 1978, 21 VCA alumni have represented Australia at the Venice Biennale.

**The Wilin Centre (Indigenous students)**

- The Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development has been an outstanding success within VCA, and is responsible for the College achieving one of the highest retention rates for indigenous students among tertiary institutions.

Further examples are listed in Appendix G.

## **CURRICULUM**

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Uniformed views about the VCA's curriculum have been the driver behind adverse changes to the VCA. SAVE VCA is concerned that these changes have not been based on any empirical research or publicised rationale. The facts are as follows.

Curriculum review has regularly occurred at VCA. This is despite suggestions to the contrary made in a number of public forums, including those within the University. Reviews ensured the College continued to meet the rapidly changing demands of students and their future employers. They included consultation with external stakeholders and, prior to VCA becoming a Faculty of the University, operated independently from the University of Melbourne (UoM) management. The repeated suggestions in such forums that the Degrees and the education therein offered by the VCA were not "equivalent" to those degrees offered by the University of Melbourne are incorrect. It should be recognised that these Degrees and Diplomas have been awarded as University of Melbourne Degrees since 1991<sup>12</sup>.

These degrees and diplomas were also subject to the University of Melbourne's rigorous process for approval and went through the University's shepherding and Academic Board processes. That they now do not "fit the Melbourne Model" or the apparent philosophy of the new management is more a matter of particular view being imposed upon the methods of education at VCA rather than a true assessment of the quality of programmes.

There have also been many assertions that students as selected by talent-based entry to the VCA do not have the "academic rigour"<sup>13</sup> to undertake the breadth subjects offered on the Parkville campus. There has been no substantive evidence on which to base such claims and internal reviews within VCA indicated many undergraduate students had either commenced or completed other undergraduate degrees prior to enrolling at VCA.

SAVE VCA is concerned that what appears to be an arrogant 'academic view' has had a significant influence on the approach taken in the appointment of the current management and the proposed directions of the "Faculty of the VCA and Music" (VCAM).

This case is further supported by those critics who argue that if VCA were to be de-merged from the University of Melbourne it must necessarily be put into the VET or TAFE sector. VCA's training was and always has been that of a leading Tertiary educator that happened to have a very different (and successful) model to that of traditional Universities.

The Dean of VCAM has indicated that VCA should benchmark itself against other Universities within the Tertiary sector, "*Our benchmark partners are institutions such as the Sydney Conservatorium and WAAPA and there is no reason we can't compete with them...*"<sup>14</sup> VCA, prior to 2007, benchmarked itself not only against Australia's leading arts training bodies but also against leading international institutions such as the Julliard, Cal Arts, National Film & Television School (UK). In fact, VCA was considered by many of those bodies as an institution to benchmark against!

The Dean has further devalued the training traditionally offered by VCA in stating "*it's siloed in its narrow little degree programs*" and that "*The only way people are learning to sustain a real career*"

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12 With the Victorian College of the Arts (Amendment) Act 1991 (Vic), which established a more extensive relationship between the University and the VCA, the affiliation came to an end. A key feature of the relationship was that the University assumed responsibility for the academic programs of the VCA, and students at the VCA who were enrolled in degree programs became students of the University. – Source [http://www.vcam.unimelb.edu.au/faculty\\_history.html](http://www.vcam.unimelb.edu.au/faculty_history.html)

13 Peter McPhee in conversation – Provost's Forum Parkville 2007

14 21/05/09 The Age "Staff, Students At Former VCA In Crisis Meetings"

*in the theatre, for example, is if they can write the play, act, make their own costume and sell the tickets.*"<sup>15</sup>, is to quote Geoffrey Rush "...starting education from a point of mediocrity".<sup>16</sup>

This erosion of VCA's core has manifested very obviously already:

- Music Theatre – suspended
- Puppetry – suspended
- Documentary, Postproduction and Visual Effects streams of the Graduate Diploma of Film and Television – suspended
- 20% of VCAM Music staff apply for Voluntary Redundancies in 2009, including three heads of Opera, Orchestra and Strings<sup>17</sup>
- Other institutions start to advertise VCA's move away from practical training as a key selling point for their own programs.<sup>18</sup>
- 25% cut in teaching weeks to come into line with University Calendar
- Loss of sessional staff
- At the time of submitting this document, VCAM Music students still were not aware of their 2010 timetables, thus making it impossible for a 2010 First Year (VCAM Melbourne Model) to compare the practical content with that offered to a 2009 First Year (VCA "Heritage" Course).

It is highly concerning that these dramatic changes have been made without forethought for students, the College's future or reference to industry. For example, we are still unsure why Music Theatre was cut at VCA given it is the cheapest degree to run at the College, has one of the highest student application rates and is located in traditional Australian home of the art form.

- 5.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson supports the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training. VCA must continue to offer degree-award courses across all art streams including Drama, Dance, Music Theatre, Puppetry, Production, Art, Music and Film and Television.
- 6.** SAVE VCA further recommends that regular curriculum review at VCA be continued (with adequate resourcing) 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.
- 7.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson request UoM to immediately release 2010 music curriculum information with a clear comparison expressed in teaching hours of 2009 vs 2010 first year music practical content.

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<sup>15</sup> The Australian 05/06/09 "Campus Revolution Aims At Producing All-Rounders"

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Rush on ABC774 - 7 August 2009

<sup>17</sup> 15/12/09 Crikey.com "Mass Exodus at VCA as Music Staff Exit Stage Left"

<sup>18</sup> Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE: "With the future of practical based training uncertain at the world renowned Victorian College of the Arts, Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) is embarking on a new acting course which is based on practical training, being offered at its well equipped Benalla campus."  
<http://www.gotafe.vic.edu.au/news/leadStory.cfm?ID=743>

## FUNDING & STRUCTURE

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As outlined in Appendix A, SAVE VCA believes a great deal of information has not been supplied to readers of the Discussion Paper, making it near impossible to get a true sense of VCA's financial status.

8. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson request a full and public audit of VCA's accounts for the period 2004 to date and obtain and publish financial advice on whether the merger has actually been a help or hindrance to the College and whether the Heads of Agreement have been followed.

Even a crude analysis of the numbers would suggest VCA has gone from a \$5m Government-imposed shortfall in 2005 to a supposed University subsidy of \$11m<sup>19</sup> in 2009 to \$33m for 2010 and 2011<sup>20</sup>. This is despite huge budget cuts including voluntary redundancies, the cutting of sessional staff, the cutting of teaching weeks and the cutting of entire degree courses. And this is without any known compensation for the University securing \$103m of VCA assets upon merger.

Far from being an economy of scale, it would seem the merger has sent VCA into major (and possibility 'created') debt.

SAVE VCA believes that the optimum outcome for VCA is to be returned to its status as an independent institution, capable of awarding its own degrees, managing its own curriculum and its own funds.

9. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recommends that direct Arts Ministry funding should be pursued (through inclusion in the Australian Roundtable program) at levels comparable to NIDA.

This is the most appropriate outcome to achieve a financially sound, independent VCA. It would be beneficial to both the Southbank and Parkville components of VCAM if the UoM pursued this option in a positive manner, capitalising on the great public and industry support demonstrated for VCA.

10. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recommends that as an interim solution, the Federal Government should *seek to immediately* reverse the financial difficulties imposed by the Howard Government in 2005 with its \$5m P/A funding cut to VCA.

Inadvertently the Federal Government is putting great strain on both the University and VCA by holding off on a review of this funding decision until 2012, and is thereby threatening a key provider of elite arts education in Australia.

11. SAVE VCA recommends that; the Chairperson recommend that as a demonstration of commitment to the Arts within Victoria, and as recognition of the direct economic impact that VCA graduates have within the sector, the Victorian Government should commit to sustained and ongoing funding for VCA to supplement the Federal contribution. This support could be best provided through either ongoing capital works or infrastructure funding or a continuing support model similar to that provided to West Australian Academy of the Performing Arts (WAAPA) by the West Australian Government.

The Victorian State Opposition has pledged that they will support a sum of \$6m P/A if elected in 2010 (Appendix F). They have also stated that they will support a demerger of the VCA from the

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<sup>19</sup> The Age 21/05/09 "Staff, Students At Former VCA In Crisis Meetings"

<sup>20</sup> 18/08/2009 The Age "Excellence Will Continue" Sharman Pretty *Letter to the Editor*

University of Melbourne if the University continues to contravene the spirit of the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill 2006.

SAVE VCA completely rejects any assertion that by VCA receiving Federal Arts Ministry funding and/or ongoing support from the Victorian Government, that this would create some kind of new precedent (and hence a 'race for cash'). No other College in this country offers every arts discipline on one campus – in fact it is extremely rare globally. As such, no other institution could ever match VCA's justification for Arts Ministry or special State funding.

### **Merger and de-merger**

SAVE VCA is fundamentally opposed to any suggestion of Music being taken out of VCA to become a wholly University of Melbourne domain or a new separate institution. VCA must remain a multidisciplinary College and any move away from this would not only threaten VCA's ability to pursue access to the Roundtable Funding, but would be in complete opposition to the founding VCA notion that all artists should learn with and from each other on a single campus.

As many published student and graduate submissions to this review have demonstrated, both the former Faculty of Music and former VCA School of Music each offer different music programs that appeal to different students – between them they offer choice. Student applicants should be able to continue to choose the most appropriate Music school for them, as they have been able since 1974.

**12.** SAVE VCA recommends: a de-merger of UoM Music and VCA Music from the 2011 academic year. 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 studio-based performance training with discipline focussed theory (VCA Music).

A de-merger would also address the unworkable constraints of having two music campuses that will necessitate students losing valuable practice / study time due to travel between campuses. The separation of Parkville and Southbank campus programs should occur regardless of whether VCA remains a faculty of the University or becomes independent.

### **Alternative University**

Similarly, should the University determine that the VCA Faculty cannot fit within its concept of the Melbourne Model,<sup>21</sup> investigation of VCA being transferred to another University that was willing to retain the practical nature of VCA's courses could be considered.

**13.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recommend other Universities publicly state their interest in VCA becoming a faculty or affiliate of their institution so it can be ascertained if such a move is viable.

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<sup>21</sup> Vice Chancellor Glynn Davis has stated publicly at a number of VCA/VCAM all-staff forums that it was up to the Faculty of the VCA/Faculty of the VCA & Music to determine whether it was appropriate for the Faculty to adopt the Melbourne Model for Undergraduate Degrees and that this was not necessarily a fait-acomplie given the unique nature of the programmes within the VCA compared to the University Melbourne Model degrees.

**14.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recognise VCA's unique funding requirements regardless of the final model. Whether the VCA remains a Faculty of UoM, transfers to another University with programmes more in line with VCA, or VCA reverts to a stand-alone institution, the Federal and State Governments need to recognise the unique cost of providing elite arts education and fund VCA appropriately.

### **Alternative sources of funding**

VCA should continue to pursue new income streams, for example, extended post-graduate programs, open programs, and attracting international students. The best chance of VCA increasing this income is by further commitment to the supply of intensive, studio-based training, which is most attractive to the arts education marketplace.<sup>22</sup> VCA has also enjoyed external and philanthropic funding in the past. Current concerns about UoM Management of VCA is reportedly affecting the potential of this income stream.

**15.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson consider the impact on the potential of VCA to raise philanthropic or corporate funding in determining the way forward.

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<sup>22</sup> Existing examples of income revenue are the non-award courses offered by Drama and Film & Television that have been running successfully for many years and have been providing financial support to the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Award courses as Federal Funding has reduced in real terms. Oddly the highly successful Music Theatre Foundation program seems to have been suspended along with the Degree program.

## LEADERSHIP

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SAVE VCA considers that the current senior leadership of VCAM does not represent or consider the views of the staff, students or arts industry. As already stated, both consultation and transparency of process have been lacking evidenced by the following;

- The first all-staff meeting by the Dean was held five months after appointment and coincided with an all-staff address by the Vice-Chancellor. At the end of that meeting representations were made directly to the Vice Chancellor regarding the lack of consultation on the process of VCAM and it was only subsequent to those representations the Dean initiated fortnightly Tuesday “briefings”.
- On the question of the constitution of the Discussion Paper Review Committee the Dean indicated that the panel would consist of representatives recommended by her and approved by the Vice Chancellor. When the Dean was questioned about the election of a representative from Southbank Campus she stated she would consider such an option. This never eventuated.
- No election of a representative from staff at the Southbank campus has taken place and, whilst SAVE VCA does not question the integrity of the individual panel members, it does question the process by which the panel has been constituted.
- Student liaison and course advisory groups have been marginalised since the formation of VCAM, as have financial support groups such as “Friends of the VCA”. Advisory Board members have recently resigned<sup>23</sup> and some have subsequently expressed concerns about the merger process.

It is difficult to construe these examples as anything but poor management and certainly not leadership or any kind of advocacy.

The Victorian College of the Arts had a number of Directors and Heads of Schools who shared a common element in their leadership of the College – a passion for the College, its values and for the arts training that it provided. Since formation of the VCAM the Management of the Faculty has demonstrated a conviction and preference for financial management over all other matters. At SAVE VCA’s only meeting with the Dean and Vice Chancellor in mid 2009 the Dean stated “my job as Dean is to balance the budget” to which SAVE VCA Spokesperson Noni Hazlehurst replied “to hear that chills me to the bone.” This attitude to VCA is at the expense of the true values of Australia’s leading arts training body and will leave the University with a mere shell of what was to be “*the jewel in the crown of the University of Melbourne*”<sup>24</sup>.

SAVE VCA is supportive of modern budgetary management, however, has seen no evidence that budgetary strategies have been successful in meeting the Dean’s objective. Rather, the objective seems to be to redirect available funds to rental and building maintenance charges charged by UoM. In this the needs of the VCAM come a poor second. Again, transparency around these objectives should be an integral part of competent leadership.

As already submitted, SAVE VCA believes a greater, active involvement is required by both the Victorian State and Federal Government to ensure Australia’s arts education and arts business landscapes are better safeguarded.

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<sup>23</sup> 20/08/09 The Age “Arts, Music Board Members Quit”

<sup>24</sup> Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis address to VCA staff during negotiations of Heads of Agreement – Federation Hall 2005

**16.** SAVE VCA recommends that should the Chairperson recommend that VCAM be de-merged from the University of Melbourne then a further recommendation be made that the current appointment of the Dean and Deputy Dean be invalidated as the terms of reference for these roles would no longer be applicable.

SAVE VCA considers that the current Dean of VCAM does not carry a view of discipline-based arts based training that would be compatible with a de-merged VCA as evidenced in both the Dean's public statements on record and demonstrated performance.

In fact, it is difficult to sustain a position that the current management of the Faculty is adequate given the examples detailed above. At the very least a review of performance and resulting structural changes are called for.

**17.** SAVE VCA recommends that at a minimum there should be a review of VCAM management as part of any structural and/or funding changes, with particular preference for allowing students and staff to have a direct say in appointments of the Dean, Deputy Dean and Heads of School.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

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SAVE VCA believes that University of Melbourne should honour the Heads of Agreement as approved by State Government legislation in 2006 and should address all contraventions to that Agreement.

The University of Melbourne should also state publicly whether it believed that the merger of the Faculty of the VCA (Southbank Campus) with the Faculty of Music (Parkville Campus) negated the Heads of Agreement as stated by the new Dean of The Faculty of the VCA & Music – *“the VCA no longer exists”*.

SAVE VCA particularly advocates addressing the contraventions below:

- **Reinstating the VCA name.** This would maintain / reinstate International recognition and location of The Victorian College of the Arts. The current name is awkward, with music clearly being one of the “arts”.
- **Reinstating the VCA logo.** Return recognition and the sense of reputation which the logo symbolizes.
- **Reinstating VCA’s unique graduation ceremony.** Once a celebration of the artistic values of each discipline and the achievements of the graduates that was a reflection of the importance of all disciplines – reduced to a formulaic university ceremony in 2009 – with music being the only art form allowed to perform.
- **Reversing the alignment of VCA and UoM’s funding arrangements.** This was not due until the fifth year of integration. This is of particular significance and requires a more detailed submission than is appropriate to the Discussion Paper. If the VCA Council had been aware of the new funding models to be introduced by Financial Operations and a range of other financial impositions introduced (along with the Responsible Division Management and rental scheme), SAVE VCA does not believe that the integration would have been approved.
- **Failing to comply with the requirement that in the interim, 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.”<sup>25</sup>**

**18.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson review the Heads of Agreement and confirm or otherwise document the contraventions already documented by SAVE VCA together with any other information on the status of the Heads of Agreement and compliance of the University of Melbourne with the Heads of Agreement.

**19.** SAVE VCA recommends that as a matter of urgency that the Chairperson review the funding arrangements since the VCA was merged with the University. In particular, increases in rental and administration costs and any increase in senior management costs and consultancies since the merger.

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25 Heads of Agreement as passed with State Government approval

## **STUDENTS & STAFF**

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SAVE VCA is aware that many talented and valuable members of teaching staff are not returning to VCA in 2010 due to proposed changes to curriculum, uncertainty of faculty direction, a climate of fear for speaking out or through tacit encouragement of voluntary redundancies. There is also evidence that select staff were encouraged to take redundancies even though they weren't eligible for them.

SAVE VCA has also been advised that staff that have taken a voluntary redundancy have been required to sign confidentiality clauses that now preclude them from participating in the process of contributing to the Discussion paper.

There is growing anecdotal evidence<sup>26</sup> the Melbourne Model as applied to VCA, and news of staff leaving, has already impacted on VCA's attractiveness to high calibre applicants including those from the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS).

New mechanisms should be established to actively retain quality staff and these should include formal, quarterly opportunities for VCA staff to supply feedback to VCAM Management (both anonymously and publicly). There is a lack of transparency within VCAM that has not existed before at either the Southbank or Parkville campuses. This is not conducive to the maintenance of an institution that has been considered world class and an example of world's best practice in the field of elite arts training.

Maintenance of the core values of the Victorian College of the Arts since its establishment in 1972 is essential to enable the continued attraction of high calibre students as part of any 're-launch' of an independent VCA<sup>27</sup>.

Survival of the VCA and its reputation, along with a continued input into the Victorian and Australian arts industry, is dependent upon demonstrating the College's continued commitment to elite arts education across *all* art forms. Education practices centered on an intensive practice-based training model, supported by discipline-specific theoretical components have been the key to the world-class reputation of the VCA.

**20.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson document the turnover of staff at the VCA in the past 2 years as part of the Review. Action should be taken as a matter of urgency to ensure the retention of highly regarded arts professionals.

**21.** SAVE VCA recommends the Chairperson investigate evidence that VCA is no longer as accessible for talented applicants post-merger. In particular we suggest investigating how many applicants have been selected for entry based on talent, but subsequently have not gained a place due low English scores or not having their Year 12 Certificate. We also ask for the Committee to pursue VCAM's rationale for limiting the cities in which VCA auditions were held for the 2010 intake.

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26 Though such "social" websites such as SAVE VCA, SAVE VCA on Facebook and on Twitter and telephone feedback to Student Services.

27 There is anecdotal evidence at Departmental / School level that local, Interstate and International applicants are concerned about the proposed changes - evident during 2009 in-person and telephone interview processes for 2010 entry. Canceling courses such as Music Theatre, Puppetry, Postproduction & Visual Effects & Documentary for 2010 add to this concern - particularly where applicants have been interviewed and then notified the courses are not being offered.

## **FUTURE**

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If the concerns expressed in this SAVE VCA submission to the Discussion Paper and those submitted by others are addressed, it may possible for VCA to emerge from the turmoil of 2009 as a stronger institution, capable of answering student demand for the highest level of intensive, practical-based, studio training across the entire arts spectrum.

If this ideal is realised, it will ensure VCA graduates continue to have the best chance of making a career in one of the most competitive industries in the world. In doing this, VCA will be able to continue contributing to a vibrant Australian artistic culture, an ever-expanding arts business and continue to be a place worth fighting for.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson should replace the 7 unelected staff and student representatives with those directly elected by the current VCAM staff and students. Appointments should be made from a selection of volunteer candidates as opposed to the Dean and Vice Chancellor choosing the candidates. This simply brings these 7 roles in line with the democratic appointment process afforded the Parkville representative. The Chairperson should also consider adding an alumni representative to the panel.
2. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson should seek the implementation of clear and enforceable benchmarks for any new funding, curriculum or branding requirements of the University (or any other body the Review Committee recommends should manage VCA) with defined public reporting procedures; as well as ongoing monitoring and active involvement from the Federal and State Education and Arts Ministers in this next period of VCA's evolution.
3. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recognise maintaining VCA's multidisciplinary teaching environment as a requirement of all future curricula, funding and staffing decisions. In addition, curricula should be guided by the expressed needs of students and their future employers.
4. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson carefully consider the impact of any recommendations on the broader reputation of VCA in Australia and overseas; and that short-term actions be considered to forestall any further reputational damage.
5. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson supports the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training. VCA must continue to offer degree-award courses across all art streams including Drama, Dance, Music Theatre, Puppetry, Production, Art, Music and Film and Television.
6. SAVE VCA further recommends that regular curriculum review at VCA be continued (with adequate resourcing) 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.
7. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson request UoM to immediately release 2010 music curriculum information with a clear comparison expressed in teaching hours of 2009 vs 2010 first year music practical content.
8. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson request a full and public audit of VCA's accounts for the period 2004 to date and obtain and publish financial advice on whether the merger has actually been a help or hindrance to the College and whether the Heads of Agreement have been followed.
9. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recommends that direct Arts Ministry funding should be pursued (through inclusion in the Australian Roundtable program) at levels comparable to NIDA.
10. SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recommends that as an interim solution, the Federal Government should *seek to immediately* reverse the financial difficulties imposed by the Howard Government in 2005 with its \$5m P/A funding cut to VCA.
11. SAVE VCA recommends that; the Chairperson recommend that as a demonstration of commitment to the Arts within Victoria, and as recognition of the direct economic impact that VCA graduates have within the sector, the Victorian Government should commit to sustained and ongoing funding for VCA to supplement the Federal contribution. This support could be best provided through either ongoing capital works or infrastructure funding or a continuing support model similar to that provided to West Australian Academy of the Performing Arts (WAPPA) by the West Australian Government.
12. SAVE VCA recommends: a de-merger of UoM Music and VCA Music from the 2011 academic year. 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 studio-based performance training with discipline focussed theory (VCA Music).

- 13.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recommend other Universities publicly state their interest in VCA becoming a faculty or affiliate of their institution so it can be ascertained if any such move is viable.
- 14.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson recognise the funding requirements regardless of the final model. Whether the VCA remains a Faculty of UoM, transfers to another University with programmes more in line with VCA, or VCA reverts to a stand-alone institution, the Federal and State Governments need to recognise the unique cost of providing elite arts education and fund VCA appropriately.
- 15.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson consider the impact on the potential of VCA to raise philanthropic or corporate funding in determining the way forward.
- 16.** SAVE VCA recommends that should the Chairperson recommend that VCAM be de-merged from the University of Melbourne then a further recommendation be made that the current appointment of the Dean and Deputy Dean be invalidated as the terms of reference for roles would no longer be applicable.
- 17.** SAVE VCA recommends that at a minimum there should be 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.
- 18.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson review the Heads of Agreement and confirm or otherwise document the contraventions already documented by SAVE VCA together with any other information on the status of the Heads of Agreement and compliance of the University of Melbourne with the Heads of Agreement.
- 19.** SAVE VCA recommends that as a matter of urgency that the Chairperson review the funding arrangements since the VCA was merged with the University. In particular, increases in rental and administration costs and any increase in senior management costs and consultancies since the merger.
- 20.** SAVE VCA recommends that the Chairperson document the turnover of staff at the VCA in the past 2 years as part of the Review. Action should be taken as a matter of urgency to ensure the retention of highly regarded arts professionals.
- 21.** SAVE VCA recommends the Chairperson investigate evidence that VCA is no longer as accessible for talented applicants post-merger. In particular we suggest investigating how many applicants have been selected for entry based on talent, but subsequently have not gained a place due low English scores or not having their Year 12 Certificate. We also ask for the Committee to pursue VCAM's rationale for limiting the cities in which VCA auditions were held for the 2010 intake.

**APPENDIX**

- A. 05/01/10 SAVE VCA Letter Re: Discussion Paper
- B. 19/01/10 UoM Response Re: Above
- C. 08/02/10 SAVE VCA Letter Re: Review Committee
- D. 01/11/09 SAVE VCA *Information for the Arts & Cultural Tourism Industries*
- E. VCA/UoM Merger Heads of Agreement
- F. 12/09/09 An Open Letter from Ted Baillieu To Students And Staff Of The VCA
- G. Economic Impact of VCA – Further Examples
- H. Key Media Coverage (241 pages spanning 2007 to present)