

Victorian College of the Arts

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
May, 2003

Background

The film and television production industry has been nominated by Victoria's Department of State and Regional Development as "a strategic industry sector"ⁱ. The economic and cultural importance of a thriving film and television industry is well understood, with its benefits to both urban and regional centres.

Victoria has a robust industry - the Australian Film Commission's national production survey showed that production spending in Victoria increased to \$144 million in 2000-2001, (up \$16 million on the previous year) and then rose even further last financial year to \$178 million.ⁱⁱ

The Docklands studio complex currently under construction is expected, upon its completion in 2004, to generate an extra \$100 million in film production annually and also create an additional 1,000 film and television industry jobs in Victoria.ⁱⁱⁱ

Victoria is also home to over 50% of Australia's Electronic Games developers - over 15 game developers along with technology providers, publishers and hardware manufacturers employing over 300 people jointly make up the industry.

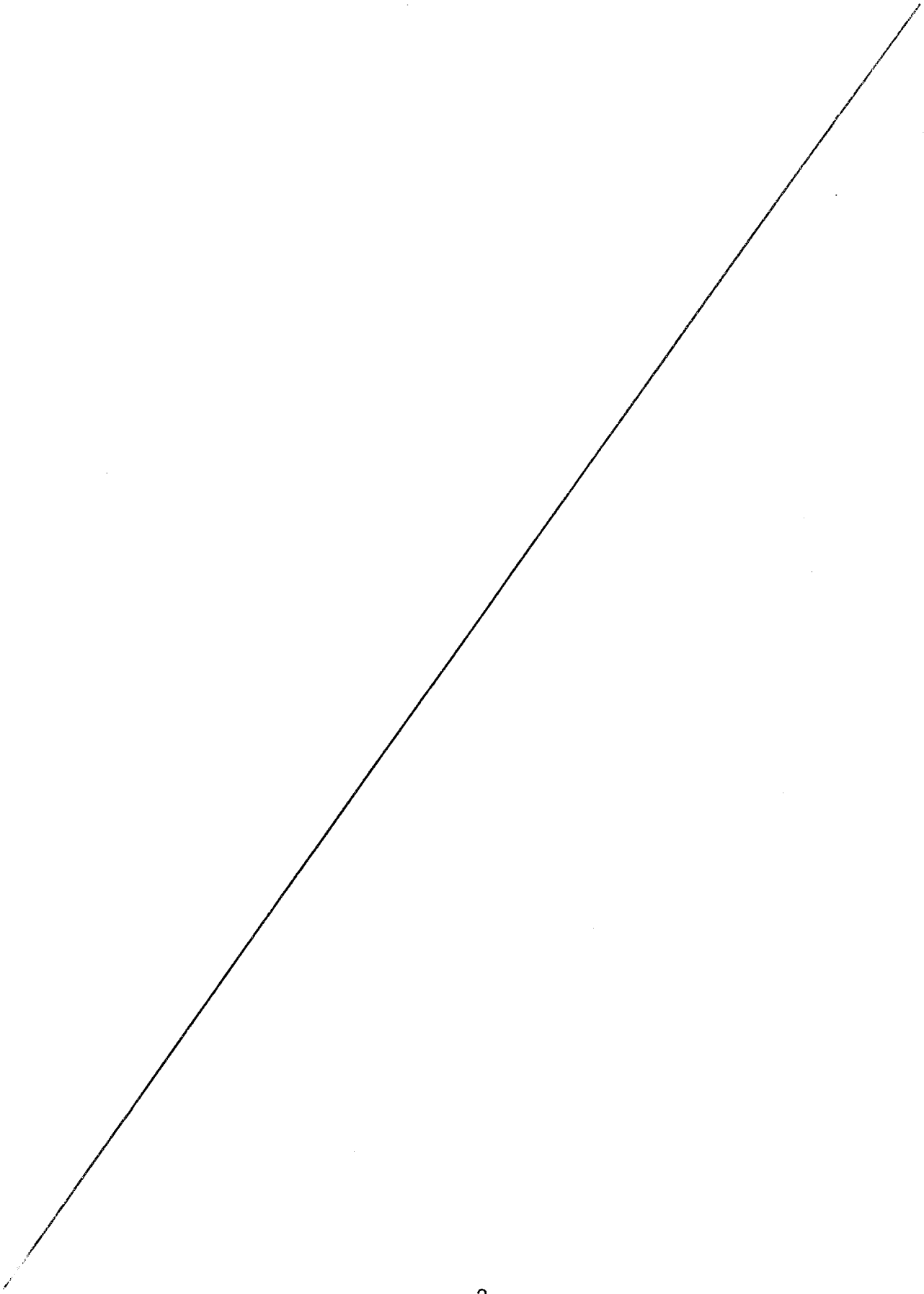
With a 20 year history in computer games development (largely due to Beam Software - now Infogrames Melbourne House) Victoria's industry development initiative, *Game Plan Game On*, is designed to assist the industry through specific initiatives in the areas of infrastructure, business growth and skills.^{iv}

The Victorian College of the Arts

The Victorian College of the Arts, by the very nature of its activities, is well placed to continue its significant contributions to the Film, Animation, Visual Effects and Electronics Games industries both locally and across Australia.

As Australia's premier visual and performing arts training institution the Victorian College of the Arts has the unique advantage of providing training in the visual arts, music, production, drama, dance, film and television on one (nine-acre) campus in the heart of Melbourne's arts precinct

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With its galleries, theatres, studios and concert halls, the VCA is a rich creative centre supporting a community of artists, lecturers and industry mentors. The college provides the highest level of training and skill development opportunities to the most talented young artists.

Graduates of the VCA pursue artistic careers both in Australia and the internationally and continue to make significant contributions to Australia's rich cultural environment.

Eminent alumni such as painter the late Howard Arkley, Patricia Piccinini, Australian Representative at the Venice Biennale for 2003, Ricky Swallow, film director Gillian Armstrong, opera singer Peter Coleman-Wright, prima ballerina Justine Summers and actor Vince Colosimo are beneficiaries of this rich tradition. Also, at the time of preparing this submission, it was announced that graduate Glendyn Ivan won the Palm D'or for best short film at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival.

There are over 1200 students and 200 staff representing more than a dozen countries, cementing the college as Australia's pre-eminent arts training institution and a truly unique and vibrant creative community. The proximity of the VCA to Melbourne's arts precinct means that the boundaries between the VCA and the real world of arts practice are minimised.

Particularly relevant to this enquiry is the training offered by the Victorian College of the Arts School of Film and Television and, also in specific areas of training within the Schools of Art and Production.

Film & Television School at the VCA

The VCA School of Film and Television is Australia's oldest film school, originating in 1966 out of the Graphic Design department of the Art School at Swinburne Technical College. The School, since its inception, has been a major contributor to the Australian Film and cultural industries at many levels and is reflected in the diversity of skills and achievements of its alumni.

The VCA School of Film and Television has an international reputation for the high quality of its graduates and is one of only two Australian members of CILECTV, the international organisation of production based film schools around the world. The School hosted the CILECT conference at the VCA campus in 2002 - bringing delegates from Film Schools around the world to Australia for only the second time in the organisation's history.

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Alumni of the VCA School of Film and Television can be found across the spectrum of activities in the Film, Television, Visual Effects, Animation and Computer Games industries both locally and abroad. Many students have developed high profile careers and graduates have won numerous awards on both the local and international stage.

Notable Alumni

Writer/Directors Emma Kate Croghan (*"Strange Planet"*, *"Love and Other Catastrophes"*), Ana Kokkinos (*"Original Mermaid"*, *"Head On"*), Geoffrey Wright (*"Metal Skin"*, *"Romper Stomper"*), Lawrence Johnston (*"Life"*, *"Eternity"*) Andrew Dominik (*"Chopper"*)

Directors Gillian Armstrong (*"Charlotte Gray"*, *"Oscar and Lucinda"*), John Ruane (*"Dead Letter Office"*, *"Death in Brunswick"*), Aleks Vellis (*"The Wog Boy"*, *"Nirvana Street Murders"*), Jamie Blanks (*"Valentine"*, *"Urban Legend"*) Robert Luketic (*"Win a Date with Tad Hamilton"*, *"Legally Blonde"*)

Producers Jonathon Shiff (*"Pirate Islands"*, *"Cybergirl"*, *"Ocean Girl"*), Andrew Wiseman (*"My Brother Jack"*)

Editor Jill Bilcock (*"Moulin Rouge"*, *"The Dish"*, *"Romeo and Juliet"*)

Directors of Photography Ian Baker (*"It runs in the Family"*, *Queen of the Damned"*, *"Evil Angels"*) Ellery Ryan (*"The Rage in Placid Lake"*, *Dead Letter Office"*, *"Angel Baby"*)\

Animators Adam Elliot (*"Uncle"*, *"Brother"*, *"Cousin"*), Sarah Watt (*"Living with Happiness"*, *"Way of the Birds"*), Peter Viska (*"Little Elvis"*)

The VCA School of Film and Television produces graduates with a broad range of skills and a comprehensive understanding of the industry.

"What I really got out of the course is that it made me an informed film-maker. It didn't just make me a pompous director sitting on a chair shouting orders at people. I actually learned how every single department and component operated. Something incredibly unique to the VCA is just how thorough the education is."

Robert Luketic, Director of Legally Blonde in a 2003 interview for radio.

Students are encouraged to be innovative, to experiment, to explore and to develop their expertise to enable them to express their ideas to an audience. Education and training at both the undergraduate and post graduate levels

require students to make motion picture productions of a high artistic and technical standard.

The central element of the VCA School of Film and Television training has been to focus on creative content where each student has to write, direct and edit their own production. These individual productions provide hands-on training in a real world sense and result in graduates with a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the film making process.

Graduates of the VCA School of Film and Television have initiated major work in the areas of Feature Film, Television Drama, Visual Effects, Animation and Interactive Media through the creation of their own companies, projects and collaborations.

Initiatives in Training

The VCA School of Film and Television has been responsible for new initiatives in the provision of training for the Australian Film and Television industry. The Australian Film industry has undergone a dramatic renaissance in the period since the School's creation in 1966 and the School's graduates have had "*a profound and disproportionate influence on the cultural life of Australia*" (Phillip Adams, Film Producer and Critic - April 1995).

Animation:

The VCA School of Film and Television was the first Australian institution to offer dedicated training in animation (1976) - graduates of the Graduate Diploma of Film & Television (Animation) forming the basis of much of the animation industry as it is today.

An initiative jointly funded by Swinburne Institute of Technology and the Victorian State Government saw the creation of the Computer Animation Development Centre (1984). This was the first computer based training offered within an animation course in Australia and formed the basis of developments in animation study over subsequent years.

The focus of the animation course within the School has traditionally been on character animation using both traditional and new techniques. Subsequent developments have included the addition of 3D modelling and 2D trace and paint animation in the delivery of the course.

The most recent developments in the area of animation were initiated as part of the introduction of digital technology to the School provided by a one-off grant of \$2.5 million by the Victorian State Government (1996).

Documentary:

In 1996 the School introduced Australia's first dedicated Post Graduate course in Documentary filmmaking - the Graduate Diploma of Film & Television (Documentary). Since that period of time graduates have had many successes including collaboration on projects with the ABC and SBS and the course has established its reputation both nationally and overseas.

Interactive Media:

In 1998 the VCA School of Film and Television introduced a Post Graduate course in Interactive Media. Designed to explore the possibilities of Interactive Storytelling the course produced graduates between 1998 and 2001 who have found employment in the area of new media and computer games industries.

Visual Effects:

2001 saw the introduction of the Graduate Diploma of Film & Television (Visual Effects). Focussing on the use of Visual Effects desktop systems now comprehensively used by the industry the course provides comprehensive training in Visual Effects and Post Production for Film, Television and Electronic

Media. Graduates have already found employment in the local industry in a range of roles.

Producing:

With seed funding assistance from the Victorian State Government the VCA School of Film and Television is introducing a Masters Degree (by research) in the area of Producing for Film and Television in 2004/2005. This course will include key areas of training in Arts Law, Business Management, Leadership and Financing .

Masters Degrees:

The VCA School of Film and Television introduced a two year Masters by Research in 2002 with a primary focus on the areas of Feature Film script development and animation. It is proposed that the existing Post Graduate program will include a one year Masters by Coursework by 2005.

The Masters by Coursework will be an extension of study from the existing Graduate Diploma of Film and Television and will be offered in the area of Narrative, Documentary, Animation, Visual Effects and Producing (research).

Future Opportunities

The Victorian College of the Arts School of Film and Television, as Australia's premier content based educator in Film, Television, Animation and Visual

Effects, will continue to make a significant contribution to the cultural development of these industries through its existing content based program.

The School is, however, keen to develop new course offerings that are relevant to the future needs of industry.

There is a range of development opportunities that, with the provision of appropriate additional funding and resources, will allow the VCA School of Film and Television to continue providing skilled graduates that meet both current and future industry demand.

For the VCA School of Film and Television new opportunities with both creative and technical training implications exist within the areas of:

Wide-screen SDTV and HDTV television production.

With the legislated move of Australian broadcasting to SDTV and HDTV television and the anticipated end of analogue broadcasting by 2006 the VCA School of Film and Television must introduce production and post production practices in line with the new Digital Television standard.^{vi}

The VCA School of Film and Television has an organisational plan established to address this need, but before implementation can occur a significant upgrade in equipment and infrastructure must be provided.

This is the highest priority within the VCA School of Film and Television at present and would allow graduates to be best prepared for working in the new Digital Television environment.

This upgrade has been fully costed and has been prepared as a separate submission to DEST's capital fund. Our submission has not been successful. The VCA urgently needs to secure financial support from government to upgrade its film and television equipment. By way of comparison, the AFTRS received significant funding the last budget to lease the latest state of the art equipment via the DCITA. In addition, AFTRS also receives significant annual funding to continually upgrade their equipment.

Virtual sets and environments for film and television production.

The VCA School of Film and Television has, in partnership with the School of Architecture, Deakin University, established a small research facility to study the real-time integration of live action with virtual sets, virtual characters and architectural environments.

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This was established through an Australian Research Council (ARC) Research Infrastructure Equipment and Facilities (RIEF) grant in 2000, with funds from the ARC, VCA and Deakin.

The facility is currently being used by Post Graduate Visual Effects students as a central part of their study, whilst an architecture research program is currently being developed by Deakin University.

The research potential in this area includes:

- Film and Television – low cost, real time on-set pre-visualisation for visual effects work including integration of 3D characters and environments.
- Architecture - study into the interaction between participants in the design and construction process and 3D virtual buildings leading to the enhancement of decision making and planning in the design and construction process
- Electronic Games – study of the interaction between game play and virtual environments.

The above research areas would be further enhanced by the inclusion of:

Motion capture and performance for 3D character animation.

Motion capture of live action performance has become an important component for the creation of 3D computer animation in Film, Television and Electronic Games.

The Screen Services Association of Victoria^{vii} has established that there is a need for motion capture facilities in Victoria (through a recent members survey) and that once such a facility were established it would be utilised extensively.

The Victorian College of the Arts has the potential to train both operators and artists in the use of this technology across the disciplines of film, television, animation, visual effects, drama dance and electronic games.

Provision of such a facility on the VCA campus could provide an incubator for Education and Industry to develop new ways of integrating this technology as well as providing tools for analysis of movement in dance and drama.

Motion tracking and motion capture would also provide opportunities for further development in the joint architecture / film and television research facility already established at the VCA School of Film and Television.

3D computer animation training for Visual Effects in Film and Television and the Electronic Games Industry

Australia's premier character animation training facility at the VCA School of Film and Television has the potential to increase the level of training for animators specialising in 3D character and environment modelling.

With appropriate funding arrangements the VCA Schools of Film and Television, Art and Production can provide 3D computer based animation training targeted specifically to meet the needs of the Film, Television and Electronic Games industries.

This training would be built on the solid foundation of an animation course with an ongoing reputation for training talented artists since 1976.

Content creation for Interactive Television

As the technology for Interactive Television matures and such services are integrated into the new Digital Television services there will be a need for content providers who understand the medium.

The Interactive Media course within the VCA School of Film and Television at its inception in 1998 focussed on interactive storytelling and has produced graduates who's work has received National and International acclaim.

This course has laid the foundations for further developments in this area as the technology becomes accepted by a wider audience.

Conclusion

As a Federally funded institution the Victorian College of the Arts can continue to assist in maximising opportunities for Australia's Film, Animation, Special Effects and Electronic Games industries through the ongoing provision of outstanding graduates, trained to the highest standards.

Curriculum development in areas to support the exciting potential growth in animation, film, special effects and electronic games industries will

require appropriate levels of funding and resources. This will allow continued quality education and training that is central to the VCA's international reputation as a major provider of talent to fuel these industries. As the VCA has

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a talent based entry, there has been a policy to not charge fees for undergraduate Australian places. The package of reforms to Higher Education announced by the Government in the 2003 budget therefore present limited opportunity to raise significant non government revenue for the necessary equipment upgrades.

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Footnotes

ⁱ Source: Submission to Government by the VCA School of Film and Television 2002
"Proposal to the Government of Victoria to establish a Film and Television Producers' Training Course at the Victorian College of the Arts"

ⁱⁱ Source: Australian Film Commission
National Survey of Feature Film and TV Drama Production Survey 2001/02
(http://www.afc.gov.au/resources/online/nps/nps01_02/6locatio.html)

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Victorian State Government Department of Major Projects
(<http://www.mpv.vic.gov.au/Web3%5Cmajorproj.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/ProjectsInnovation+and+investmentDocklands+Film+and+Television+Studios?OpenDocument&Start=1&Count=1000&Expand=3.3.2&>)

^{iv} Source: Multimedia Victoria
(<http://www.mmv.vic.gov.au/games>)

^v CILECT - Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision / International Association of Cinema and Television Schools
(<http://www.cilect.org/>)
- The Australian Film, Television and Radio School is also a member of CILECT.

^{vi} Reference: Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Digital Broadcasting and Datacasting - Fact sheet
(http://www.dcita.gov.au/Article/0,,0_1-2_1-4_14718,00.html)

^{vii} The Screen Services Association of Victoria (SSAV) was formally established in 2000 to represent the film, television and digital services industry in Victoria. Membership covers a wide diversity of service businesses providing the essential infrastructure for production and post-production in Victoria. SSAV provides a much needed voice, promoting Victoria's state of the art facilities and technical and creative expertise, while also speaking with authority to government and other local and international bodies. The VCA School of Film and Television is a full member of the SSAV.
(<http://www.screenservices.com.au/homepage.html>)