



Art Association of Australia and New Zealand

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Dr Michael Spence
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
University of Sydney

Wednesday, 20 July 2016

Dear Dr Spence,

I am writing to voice my strong objection to the proposed merger between the Sydney College of the Arts and University of New South Wales Art and Design.

As you may be aware, the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand is the peak professional body for art historians, artists and curators in Australasia. Our principal activities are publishing the peer-reviewed *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, holding an annual conference, and administering several prizes that recognise outstanding achievement across the local and international art publishing industry. Through these activities, the Association acts as an advocate for the visual arts in Australia and New Zealand.

Closing the University of Sydney's art school would be incredibly shortsighted. Employment in the arts industry continues to grow faster than the national average and the creativity fostered by art training will be increasingly in demand in our future economy. It is hard to understand why the University would consider closing down a centre of training and research in an area so vital to our nation's future prosperity. Given the uncertain future of the National Art School, it is even harder to understand why a city the size of Sydney cannot fully support more than one major art school when other cities in Australia have successfully done so.

The Sydney College of the Arts has produced some of the finest graduates in Australia, many of whom have gone onto successful artistic careers both in Australia and internationally. Current Sydney College of the Arts staff have a demonstrated track record of producing important research and have recently achieved an Excellence in Research Australia ranking that is above world-class. The College's staff and students have played a significant role in our Association's activities, by hosting conference sessions, delivering papers and generally enriching the intellectual and cultural landscape in the Australasian region. Merging the two institutions would not only involve a major loss of capacity but also of diversity in art training and research in this country, as the College has extensive specialist art-making facilities on site which do not exist

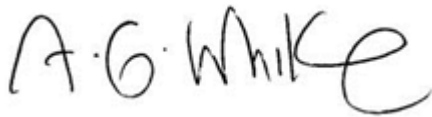
elsewhere in Sydney. The merger means homogenising a significant part of the tertiary education sector in New South Wales.

I have grave concerns for the existing staff and students in the College who appear not to have been properly consulted, nor to have certainty about their future employment. Assurances that students will be able to finish their degrees do not consider the fact that they will receive their qualification from a different institution to the one they enrolled in, which constitutes a breach of trust. This is exacerbated by the fact that the announcement was made at a time when there was little opportunity for feedback and protest. Reports that staff have been told to remember who they are employed by before they speak out are particularly alarming.

All of the above points raise serious questions about the rationale for the merger and the decision making process that led to this proposal. The strength of the Sydney College of the Arts, its importance within both the University and more broadly means there simply is no clear, defensible justification for the merger. The only conclusion one can reach is that the College has been unjustly targeted due to a misperception or misunderstanding of its significance.

In light of the above, I ask you urgently to reconsider the proposed merger.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A.G. White". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Dr Anthony White

President

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