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## Introduction

A distinguishing purpose of higher education is to make a meaningful contribution to society through the continuous search for new knowledge and understanding and the promotion of critical thinking and expression in our academic community. The ability to engage in debate and discourse, free from the interference of unwarranted authorities, is essential in achieving these ends. MetFilm is, therefore, committed to the upholding of the rights to academic freedom and its observation of Section 202 of the Education Reform Act 1988 which states that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions.

## Statement

- At MetFilm, academic freedom is defined by its academic community having, within the available resource and within the institutional codes of conduct, the right(s) to:
  - freedom in teaching and discussion;
  - freedom in carrying out research without commercial or political interference;
  - freedom to disseminate and publish one's research findings;
  - freedom from institutional censorship, including the right to express one's opinion publicly about the institution or the education system in which one works; and
  - freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies.
- Academic freedom is framed by broader civil liberties and human rights. MetFilm's academic community has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion, expression, association and assembly. MetFilm will not hinder or impede colleagues in exercising their civil rights as citizens, including the right to contribute to social change, within the institutional codes of conduct, through free expression of opinion on matters of public interest.
- Academic freedom also requires the collegiate engagement of the academic community in institutional governance, strategic planning and operational decision-making. MetFilm is committed to its academic community playing the pre-eminent role in determining the curriculum, assessment standards and research priorities. The academic community is therefore appropriately represented on committees. This includes membership on the the Ethical

Approval Committee, the Academic Quality Committee, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, the Screen Enterprise Group and the Academic Board. MetFilm will also endeavour to engage with processes of full consultation with the academic community on relevant academic matters.

- In our mission to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge and understanding, MetFilm's academic community is encouraged to test received wisdom in two key aspects of our academic work:
  - **Teaching and learning:** the purpose of higher education is to create graduates who think critically and independently and the teaching and learning exchange is a key mechanism for this to occur. MetFilm's academic community has a key role to play in delivering innovative programmes of study and curricular content informed by the latest thinking and research, including their own research and scholarship, and that this may include controversial or unpopular views. This may also include enriching the curriculum through inviting speakers who may hold controversial or challenging views, and doing so in the context of expressing that their views may be subject to challenge and debate, and to encourage academic colleagues and students to enter into such debate.
  - **Research and scholarly practice:** MetFilm's academic community has the freedom to conduct research and scholarship which will of itself contribute to knowledge, and generate and disseminate new ideas. Furthermore, MetFilm will identify institutionally agreed research themes which provide a framework and reference point for research undertaken in the institution. This supports academic freedom in helping to foster collaboration and academic communities of practice. Research which has societal impact may by its very nature be subject to challenge and contested by individuals, groups or bodies. Academic staff should feel free to be able to publish, promote and defend their research on the basis that it is based on robust enquiry and/or evidence, and this in turn may involve the challenging and testing of others' research and scholarship as part of this process. This should be without fear of reprisal or adverse employment consequences.
- The right to academic freedom is subject to the responsibilities and obligations of the academic community exerting that right. Specific responsibilities and obligations include:
  - respecting the democratic rights and freedoms of other academic staff, students, visitors and wider society. This includes ensuring that the right to academic freedom does not support or promote individuals or groups who incite hatred or violence against any group or seek to undermine society's or a group's fundamental democratic rights and freedoms;
  - that in presenting particular perspectives to students, staff and external audiences that such viewpoints have some grounding in scholarship, evidence and a wider context and
  - are subject to robust debate, including accommodating contrary perspectives and opinions;
  - that academic staff are often seen as representative voices of a particular discipline, subject area, or the institution and should not seek to express views in such a way as bring any of these into disrepute;
  - that in presenting research it is in line with the professional norms of the academic and disciplinary community including standards of ethics, procedure, evidence and argument;
  - that research cannot be conducted in isolation from lawful conduct and enquiry, MetFilm's policy and internal and external considerations which may define the scope or terms and conditions of the research;
  - ensuring that research is subject to MetFilm's ethical procedures and that where research involves access to sensitive material, including extremism-related material for research purposes is approved as a bona fide academic activity;
  - to exercise academic freedom so as not to undermine those individuals' or groups
  - rights to privacy and family life or make them subject to discrimination.