

Responsible Person	Head of Student Support and Administration
Approving Body	Academic Board
Date of Approval	July 2023
Date of Effect	September 2023
Updated	Every 4 years
Next Review Date	July 2028
Queries	<a href="mailto:quality@metfilmschool.ac.uk">quality@metfilmschool.ac.uk</a>

## Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Scope .....	2
3	Who to tell .....	3
4	Support Arrangements for pregnant students and students who become parents or carers.....	4
5	What students can expect from staff supporting them .....	6
6	Breastfeeding / Chestfeeding / Nursing .....	7
7	Complaints .....	7

## 1 Introduction

### Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy sets out MetFilm School’s (the School) commitment to ensuring the protection afforded to students under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) during pregnancy and maternity. The Act considers pregnancy and maternity to be a protected characteristic and prohibits discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation on these grounds.
- 1.2 This policy also sets out the School commitment to any student who becomes or is due to become a parent, whether through being the partner of a pregnant person, adoption or surrogacy.
- 1.3 MetFilm School believes that becoming pregnant, adopting a child or caring for an individual should not be a barrier to applying for, starting or succeeding in a programme of study. The School is therefore committed to being as flexible as possible to meet students’ and applicants’ needs, ensuring that students and applicants are not disadvantaged but also ensuring that academic standards are upheld.

- 1.4 The degree of flexibility that can be offered to pregnant students or students who become parents or carers may vary between programmes of study, which may be subject to specific requirements or risks. Students must be aware that while the School seeks to be as supportive as possible it may not be able to agree to all requests.
- 1.5 The following principals should be adhered to when applying the policy:
- The best interests of the student are considered in relation to their personal situation, their health, wellbeing and/or any disability they may experience.
  - Students are supported to study to the best of their ability, and wherever possible to meet the required learning outcomes and complete their course.

## 2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to students registered on programmes offered by MetFilm School, both accredited and non-accredited provision (also known as Short Courses).

This policy applies to:

- any student who becomes pregnant during their studies and wishes to continue with their pregnancy, who wishes to end their pregnancy or who experience the loss of a pregnancy
- pregnant applicants
- any student becoming a parent of a child\*
- any student becoming a parent through adoption or surrogacy\*
- students who are about to become co-parents, including same-sex partners expecting to be responsible for the child\*
- students carers, defined as those students who have care for dependant adults. (see point 2.2 below)

\*regardless of whether their partner is a MetFilm School Student or not.

The policy also includes support in place for breastfeeding / chestfeeding individuals. Please see section 6 for more information.

- 2.2 The School recognises that there may be students with caring responsibilities for adults (e.g. parents or other individuals) and that this arrangement may not always be formally recognized or remunerated, but that it nonetheless impacts on a students academic experience. Where students are able to demonstrate caring responsibilities, through verifiable third party supporting evidence, the School will seek to apply this policy to those students. Where the caring responsibilities are short term (lasting for less than six months), they should be dealt with through the University of West London's Extenuating Circumstances Regulations instead.
- 2.3 Although this policy focuses on pregnancy and maternity as it is defined under the Equality Act 2010, many of the points raised will also apply to those who are adopting or becoming a parent via surrogacy, and indeed to students with evidenced caring responsibilities. Legal protection under the Act may apply differently in relation to discrimination by association as pregnant and breastfeeding people have specific rights under legislation.

- 2.4 If a student who becomes pregnant or who becomes a parent also holds a contract of employment with MetFilm School, whilst also enrolled as a student of the School, they should seek advice from Human Resources at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.5 When invoking this policy and procedure, MetFilm School will offer support to the student in question. The level and form of support will vary according to the circumstances of the student.

### **3 Who to tell**

- 3.1 Students who become pregnant or who are due to become parents are encouraged to contact Student Support and Wellbeing for confidential support and signposting to relevant services.
- 3.2 Student Support and Wellbeing can offer advice and assistance whether the student intends to continue with their pregnancy, intends to terminate their pregnancy or has experienced the loss of a pregnancy. When there are still decisions to be made around the continuation of the pregnancy, staff will provide signposting to qualified individuals who are able to help
- 3.3 In order to initiate discussion of any implications for their programme of study, where a student has become pregnant and intends to continue with the pregnancy it is extremely important to disclose their pregnancy to their programme team, normally via their level leader or course coordinator. These may include any likely absences, implications for assessment or submission of work.
- 3.4 It is advisable for a pregnant student informs the School as soon as possible so that a full risk assessment can be carried out<sup>1</sup>. A member of programme team staff along with the Disability and Wellbeing Manager should arrange a Pregnancy Risk Assessment appointment for the student so that a risk assessment can be carried out and any required mitigations put in place.
- 3.5 If the pregnancy does not continue, there may be no need for any staff at the School to know (unless the student wishes them to know). However, there may still be circumstances where it is important to inform the School in the interests of the health and safety of the pregnant student for the time in which they remain pregnant. Pregnant students are still encouraged to access Student Support and Wellbeing whether the pregnancy continues or not.
- 3.6 Where a student is not pregnant but is due to become a parent or carer, they are also encouraged to discuss this with their Level Leader, Programme Leader or other suitable representative of their programme team in order to discuss any likely periods of absence or any implications for assessment or submission of work. See section below on Parent/Carer Action Plans.
- 3.7 Any student who is pregnant or is due to become a parent or carer should ensure their School has up to date contact details and those of an emergency contact person on their Student Gateway Account.

---

<sup>1</sup> The first 13 weeks of pregnancy can be particularly high risk. Consequently, students are strongly encouraged to notify the School as early as possible of their pregnancy so that a health and safety assessment can be considered

- 3.8 If a student wishes or needs to discuss their pregnancy with a member of staff, they should be allowed, wherever possible in the circumstances, to choose the gender of the member of staff they speak to.

### Confidentiality

---

- 3.9 Information on a student's pregnancy/caring responsibilities needs to be treated confidentially and with sensitivity within the agreed parameters of the policy (i.e. being passed on with only the student's consent or in accordance with Data Protection legislation) with the understanding that in certain circumstances this information will be shared with others who need to be aware of the situation. Guidance about Data Protection can be found in the School's Data Protection policy

### Admissions

---

- 3.10 Students who are pregnant at the start of their course can contact the Admissions team who will take necessary steps to advise them regarding adjustments for their programme of study. Each case will need to be considered individually as course requirements vary greatly.
- 3.11 For full details of the School's policies on admission, please consult our Admissions Policy.

## 4 Support Arrangements for pregnant students and students who become parents or carers

### Parent and Carer Support Action Plan

---

- 4.1 Once you inform your department of your pregnancy or parental or caring responsibilities, they should offer you a meeting to discuss within **five working days**. At this appointment, you will discuss your options for continuing your course and how the School can support you. A member of the Wellbeing team should be present at this meeting. If required, evidence of informal long term caring arrangements may be requested.
- 4.2 A Parent and Carer Support Action Plan should be agreed and a copy retained on the student record system. The student or School can recommend a review if they have reason to believe that the support in place is not working.
- 4.3 Additional support might include (this is not an exhaustive list):
- adjustment to attendance and classes
  - approved absence arrangements for attendance at appointments and classes
  - agreeing on an interruption of studies if appropriate
  - a review of your fees and funding
  - a Health and Safety risk assessment (especially important for planned shoot)
- 4.4 It is important to ensure that if a student with an existing ISP (Individual Support Plan) discloses a pregnancy or caring responsibilities, their ISP should be reviewed to ensure they are effectively supported.
- 4.5 Where possible flexibility should be exercised whilst ensuring that academic standards are maintained. Cases will be dealt with on an individual basis as circumstances and course requirements will vary. It may not be possible for the School to agree to every

request but it is important to ensure students are not treated unfavourably or disadvantaged due to pregnancy.

### Interrupting Study or Withdrawal

---

- 4.6 Whether to continue studies during or after pregnancy or becoming a parent will be a very personal decision and will likely depend on a range of personal, education and financial circumstances. If a student decides to interrupt or withdraw from their studies, the normal Student Transfer, Interruption and Withdrawal processes and procedures should be applied.

### International students

---

- 4.7 International students will need to check the implications of their pregnancy and/or parental status for their visa.
- 4.8 At present students who require a visa to study in the UK cannot extend their visa in the UK for reasons relating to pregnancy or maternity. If a student wishes to take a short break after the birth of their baby they may be able to do so through the School Interruption and Withdrawal processes and with due consideration and agreement provided by any funding bodies or visa requirements. However the student must still be able to complete their studies within the period of their existing visa.
- 4.9 If a student wishes to take a break in excess of 14 days then they must apply for an Interruption of Study. Interruption can last up to 60 days, but students must still be able to complete their studies within the period of their existing visa. Please see the Student Transfer, Interruption and Withdrawal Policy and Procedure for more detail. The need to interrupt or withdraw from studies can have a significant impact on fees, funding and visa arrangements. Advice and guidance is available from Student Support, and international students are strongly encouraged to reach out to the Student Support team at [admin@metfilmschool.ac.uk](mailto:admin@metfilmschool.ac.uk) at the earliest opportunity to seek advice.
- 4.10 **Pregnant international students or international students who are due to become parents are strongly encouraged to discuss their situation with Student Support and Wellbeing at the earliest opportunity.**

### All students

---

- 4.11 There may also be some circumstances where the School will require a student to take an 'Interruption of Study', but the student will always be consulted on this decision. This may occur, for example, where a module which is a core requirement of the programme of study is considered a high level risk to the health and safety of the pregnant student and/or the foetus/unborn child.
- 4.12 Due to health and safety requirements, any student who has given birth (including all forms of birth, e.g. c-section) **will be expected to take a minimum of two weeks' leave immediately following the birth.** This period of leave may be longer where there is a health and safety risk due to the nature of the programme or study or placement (e.g. heavy lifting, working with certain chemicals etc). Students should be assured that the School will be supportive of them taking this time as an absolute minimum to care for themselves and their child. If the student cannot take this leave, for example due to short term study activities, placements, trips etc which may be cut short, advice can be sought from the Student Support and Wellbeing team.

## Extenuating circumstances

---

- 4.13 Pregnancy and becoming a parent will not generally be considered under the University of West London extenuating circumstances regulations in isolation, as a Parent or Carer Support Action Plan should be put in place, but it will be considered where there are associated health issues or unforeseen circumstances that impact on the student's ability to complete assessments. This might include, for example, where a pregnancy is unplanned and the student's emotional and physical wellbeing is being affected.
- 4.14 If a student is unable to submit, or take part in, an assessment on time due to a partner's labour or pregnancy related illness/complications, they should notify their Programme Team as soon as possible to seek further guidance. A student should report any circumstance that negatively impacts their academic performance in assessments to the School through the Extenuating Circumstances procedure.
- 4.15 If a pregnant student needs adjustments in order to sit examinations (such as the need for a different chair or comfort breaks) then the School may be able to accommodate these with adequate notice. Students are advised to discuss these with Student Support and Wellbeing and with their School at the earliest opportunity. If a pregnant student is unable to attend assessments due to associated health issues or unforeseen circumstances related to pregnancy or birth, they should report extenuating circumstances.

## Absences for appointments

---

- 4.16 A student who is pregnant or a student carer will be able to take time off to attend any routine appointments associated with their caring responsibilities or emergency antenatal appointments. This can be managed through the usual absence procedures relevant to that student's programme of study. Where a student is adopting, the primary adopter will also be granted time off to attend routine adoption or matching appointments.
- 4.17 Students whose partner is pregnant or whose partner is the primary adopter of a child may wish to take time off for antenatal appointments (or matching appointments). If such appointments conflict unavoidably with lectures or with placement opportunities, they will need to discuss with their Programme Team. It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements to catch up on any missed work, taking the relevant absences and interruption to study policies into consideration. If there is a conflict with assessments or examinations, this should be managed ahead of time through the Parent or Carer Action Plan .

## 5 What students can expect from staff supporting them

- 5.1 Members of staff should consider the guidance below when supporting a student who is pregnant or becoming a parent whilst studying at the School
- 5.2 Staff should avoid making assumptions about a student's pregnancy or the process by which a student is becoming a parent. This includes assuming a student is pregnant, assuming the sex or presence of a partner, making assumptions as to how the

pregnancy will progress. Staff should also avoid asking probing questions about a pregnancy except on a need to know basis (e.g. to determine the appropriate type and amount of leave).

- 5.3 Staff should be conscious to the best of their ability of the language they use when discussing a student's pregnancy or the process of becoming a parent. Where a student discloses that they will not continue with their pregnancy, for example, staff should be sensitive to the use of terminology which may be upsetting or offensive to the pregnant student (e.g. 'child' or 'baby'). Likewise, medical terminology such as 'embryo' or 'foetus' may be inappropriate where a student is heavily pregnant and planning for the arrival of their baby.
- 5.4 Where a student is faced with decisions about their pregnancy, staff should not convey personal views or attempt to influence the decision that is made.
- 5.5 Staff should be aware of their responsibility to arrange for necessary risk assessments to be carried out when a student discloses their pregnancy.

## **6 Breastfeeding / Chestfeeding / Nursing**

- 6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, specific provision is given to "breastfeeding mothers". The School however strives to be inclusive of all individuals who wish to nurse a child, regardless of their gender identity. The School therefore recognises that some trans and non-binary individuals may use different terminology to describe the act of nursing, including "chestfeeding". In the interests of clarity with respect to the laws in place that offer protection to breastfeeding individuals, and to distinguish breastfeeding from other forms of feeding a child, the term breastfeeding is used throughout the document. The term 'mother' is not linked to this however, as the School recognises that not all individuals who breast/chestfeed a child will identify as a mother. However, the School fully supports individuals choosing to use the terminology which best describes their gender identity and/or experience of nursing their child and encourage students to use whichever terms are most appropriate when engaging with all areas of the School.
- 6.2 The School will support students who are breastfeeding. Whilst equality law does not stipulate that breastfeeding and rest facilities have to be provided to students, care should be taken to ensure that breastfeeding students' needs are met, where possible, to avoid less favourable treatment. The School should also aim to provide a private, healthy and safe environment for breastfeeding students to express and store milk. It is not appropriate to expect students who are nursing a child to use a toilet for breastfeeding, or for expressing milk.
- 6.3 On campus, students should be reassured that breastfeeding is allowed in any public or communal area in line with the Equality Act 2010, which gives explicit protection for breastfeeding in public places. Due care and attention should be given to the area in which a student chooses to breastfeed. If there is a health and safety risk to any individuals present, this may override the right to breast/chestfeed in that area.
- 6.4 If a pregnant, breastfeeding or chestfeeding student requires specific arrangements, this should be discussed with their programme team, level leader, or with the Student Support and Wellbeing. It may be necessary to seek advice from the Head of Estates.

## **7 Complaints**

- 7.1 If students do not feel that they have been treated in accordance with this policy they should raise their concerns in line with the student complaints processes outlined in the Student Concerns, Complaints and Appeals policy.
- 7.2 MetFilm School welcomes differences and is committed to ensuring a positive learning environment for all of our students, where harassment and bullying are unacceptable. If students believe they have been subject to discrimination, harassment or bullying as a result of being pregnant or becoming a parent, they should refer to the Bullying and Harassment Policy.