

Learning from the experts



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Mentoring for Women Working in the Film and Television Industry

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In brief

To redress women's poor representation and career prospects in the British film and TV industry, the membership association WFTV (Women in Film & Television UK) runs a mid-career mentoring scheme for an annual cohort of 20 women. It is targeted at women with at least five years of experience in any type of job in the sector, who are facing a specific career challenge.

Mentees are matched with an experienced mentor of either sex, who spends six hours with them over a six-month period. The scheme also involves fortnightly seminars where participants meet up to share knowledge, experience and best practice through a series of peer-to-peer seminars.

The scheme, unique in Britain, is funded by sponsors Creative Skillset, Channel 4, the BBC and EON Productions. The meetings take place in London, which makes it more challenging for women based outside London, but nevertheless demand greatly exceeds supply and mentees have attended from as far as Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Sheffield and Edinburgh.

Patchy support for equal representation

The UK shows considerable gender gaps in the media in terms of women's representation and employment. For example, a study conducted in 2011 involved a daily count of the number of male and female writers on seven national newspapers as well as the number of reporters on a long-running early-morning news and current affairs radio programme (the Today Programme). It found that the average percentage of female reporters was 22.6% compared to 77.4% of male reporters. The study also showed that all national papers had large gender gaps in their by-line averages with the Daily Mail and Guardian recording the lowest male dominance, which was still 68% and 72% respectively (Guardian, 6 December 2011).[1] The latest research done in the UK by Creative Skillset shows that more women than men enter the TV industry in their twenties; the women are better qualified academically, work longer hours and do more in-service courses, yet earn on average £6,700 (€6,400) a year less than men in equivalent jobs. Also they have a 50% chance of being out of the industry by the age of 35. Thus women tend to not get to the very top levels of management because half of them have left the industry by the time they are in mid-career.

Opinion sections in newspapers can shape a society's opinions and therefore are an important measure of women's voices in society; however this area is also male-dominated. According to research by the Guardian of articles written over the period from July 2011 to June 2012 in three national newspapers, women write only around a quarter (26%) of opinion sections in UK newspapers (Guardian, 7 September 2012).

Women's poor representation in the media has led to the launch of some campaigns in the UK to increase women's representation in the media. In February 2012, the Broadcast magazine launched an 'Expert Women' campaign to help to increase the number of female experts interviewed on television. Media organisations such as the private-sector broadcasters Channel 4 and BSkyB pledged their support for the campaign and the BBC Academy launched a series of training days for female experts with specialist knowledge in areas where women tend to be under-represented in the broadcast media. A total of 164 women participated in seven events that took place across the UK. Of those women, 73 subsequently made 374 appearances across TV and radio (as of December 2013).

Although some progress has been made in women obtaining decision-making positions, this is more apparent in middle management positions rather than at the very top levels of the media industry. For instance, in television, there is a significant lack of female drama directors, scriptwriters, camera and sound operators, and women in technical roles – and there are too few women on the boards of broadcast companies. Over the last few years however, increasing numbers of women have left the main broadcasting companies to set up their own, independent companies. Therefore, an increasing number of independent companies are run by women, but these are quite small and they still need the larger broadcasting companies to commission their programmes.

Mentoring for 20 women every year

In order to redress the gender imbalances found in the film and television industry, Women in Film & Television UK (WFTV) runs a mentoring scheme for an annual cohort of 20 women working in this sector. Founded in 1989, WFTV is the leading membership organisation for women working in creative media in Britain, and is part of a 10,000-strong worldwide network. Besides offering this mentoring scheme, WFTV hosts a variety of events such as networking evenings throughout the year, and it collaborates with industry bodies on research projects and to lobby for women's interests.

The problem that instigated the development of the mentoring scheme was that women in the film and television industry often drop out of the industry in their 30s. The mentoring scheme focuses on helping mid-career women reinvent, rejuvenate or relaunch their careers when they have reached a point where they feel stuck. The scheme is aimed at women who have more than five years of experience in the film and television industry, although selected mentees typically have 10-15+ years' experience.

The scheme accepts women working in editorial, craft or business roles in any genre. Each cohort might include agents, financiers, vision mixers, presenters, distributors, lawyers, composers, and voice-over artists as well as directors, producers and writers. They each have a clear goal that they are working towards, such as securing a promotion, establishing themselves as freelancers after redundancy or maternity leave, or rebranding themselves in anticipation of a change in direction. The goal must be a personal development goal rather than project-related (for example raising finance for a film would not be counted as a goal).

Over six months, selected participants receive six hours of mentoring contact with an experienced industry figure, combined with an intensive programme of seminars, training workshops and networking opportunities. Each participant is provided with a mentor from a top-level position in

networking opportunities. Each participant is provided with a mentor from a top level position in television. Mentors can for example be TV controllers, company MDs or top producers.

The scheme also involves fortnightly seminars where participants meet up to share experiences and best practices. Every participant must deliver a one-hour seminar on their area of expertise, such as crowd-funding, distribution, commissioning or post-production. There are also workshops that cover areas such as CV writing, networking and time management skills, as well as masterclasses from guest speakers.

The participants set out their goals at the start of the scheme and reports are filled in mid-way and at the end of the scheme to help them track their progress. Feedback given by the participants on these reports is used to shape the content of each individual scheme as it progresses.

Providing women with effective training and support is particularly important given the current nature of the film and television industry, which is largely based on a freelance economy, the unpredictability of which can make people feel isolated and which can, in turn, undermine confidence if there are no supportive networks in place. Besides fostering the careers of the participating women, the mentoring scheme has a positive impact on the wider industry. The networks that the mentees form continue long after the scheme has finished and many of the women go on to work with each other. They also become mentors in their own right and many mentees have delivered their seminars to universities and film festivals across the UK, which means they become role models for young women entering the industry.

The scheme is sustainable as it can count on several sponsors, which include key organisations in the media and creative industry such as Creative Skillset, Channel 4, the BBC and EON Productions. It is also extremely cost-effective, with an overall budget of £1,250 (€1,500) per person for the six months.

Mentees' success

The scheme has produced tangible results:

- Several mentees were promoted to senior and international executive roles during their scheme or soon after it ended;
- A series producer set up a production company that now has offices in London and Cardiff and has won several international commissions;
- A factual writer/director and a fiction producer teamed up to successfully pitch a series to a US cable network;

- A producer/financier set up an Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) scheme during the mentoring period and went on to help finance Carol Morley's latest feature film *The Falling*;
- A development producer negotiated a 50% increase in salary;
- A TV director is in active development with her first fiction feature, which now has a US producer attached and has just been accepted into Sundance Labs;
- A TV producer/director embarked on a personal feature-length documentary during her scheme, which is due to have its world premiere at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) 2014;
- A writer who had been out of the industry for many years now has two feature film scripts optioned and in active development;
- A motion designer working in documentary secured her first fiction feature commission as a direct result of connections made on the scheme.

The scheme focuses on encouraging the women to recognise their existing expertise and giving them the information and tools they need to make good strategic career decisions. It also helps them raise their professional profile through networking, social media and participation in industry panels at festivals and conferences, which in turn ensures they are exposed to more opportunities. One mentee commented:

"The WFTV mentoring scheme works on so many levels but especially for women who feel stuck or are re-starting their careers. It helped me to update my industry knowledge and widen my contacts. Having 1:1 mentoring helped me to boost my confidence immeasurably and knowing that I have a network of powerful women who work across the TV/film industry I know now that anything is possible"

Not enough places

The mentoring scheme is monitored via participant feedback forms. This is very important for WFTV as it is a way of maintaining high standards and establishing whether the scheme is effective.

The WFTV scheme is the only mentoring scheme aimed solely at women in the film and TV industry in the UK. Its success relies on a deep knowledge of the media industry, and being part of a well-designed strategy that takes into consideration the main factors that marginalise women in the industry and then compensates for them. It carefully assesses the needs of women working in film and television industry, and addresses real problems that have been experienced by WFTV's

members. It uses women's networks to share knowledge, and has the support of key actors in the media and creative industry, such as Channel 4 and Creative Skillset, an industry body that supports skills and training for people and businesses in the UK.

The main obstacle it faces is a capacity constraint: although hundreds of women apply, there is only enough funding to take on 20 women at a time. There have also been difficulties in relation to geographic mobility as WFTV is based in London so participants must travel if they live outside London.

All the elements that have contributed to the effectiveness of this mentoring scheme apply to the film and television industries of all European countries, which makes the mentoring easily replicable elsewhere.

The lessons learned from the scheme are that:

- Such activities should not treat women as 'a special case' because this is counter-productive: employers will not hire people they have to make concessions for, and will lead people in the industry to treat women according to their gender, e.g. as a 'female director' rather than a 'director'.
- Mentoring scheme methods should focus on improving women's confidence by establishing what skills and expertise they have, rather than playing on setbacks due to their gender. This is why the WFTV Mentoring Scheme focuses on women sharing their expertise, raising their professional profile, and taking creative risks as much as having a good mentor as sounding board.
- One of the main ways that a woman can succeed in the media industry is to have a mentor. Most women who have progressed to top-level positions in their careers have had official and unofficial mentors.
- Setting up networks and women's groups may be useful methods of sharing knowledge, best practice, advice, ideas and information about jobs in the media industry.

[1] Data at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AonYZs4MzIZbdHpkZDV5T05XYkJ...>

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Further information

[Website](#)



[Broadcast magazine 16 September 2011: Learning for the Masters](#)



[Creative Skillset](#)



[Guardian 6 December 2011: Women's Representation in the Media: who's running the show?](#)



[Guardian 4 December 2011: Why is British public life dominated by men?](#)



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Logo and photo from WFTV website: <http://www.wftv.org.uk/mentoring-scheme/applications-scheme>

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[EIGE's collection of good practices](#)



EIGE's approach to good practices



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