



Women in Film & Television Mentoring Scheme

Executive Summary:

This is an annual mid-career scheme aimed at women working in film and television who are facing a significant challenge. Issues addressed have included redundancy; returning from a career break; dealing with a new promotion or moving in a different direction. The scheme runs for six months, during which time participants receive six hours of mentoring contact with an experienced industry figure alongside an intensive programme of exclusive peer-to-peer seminars, WFTV member events and wider industry networking opportunities. Each scheme consists of 20 diverse women (job role; industry sector; age; BAME; geographical origin; disability etc) who meet fortnightly and form a tight-knit support group that continues long after the scheme officially ends; each mentee also joins a growing alumni network.

What are your goals?

The scheme in its current form was launched in 2011 in response to a 2009 Creative Skillset census that revealed that 4950 women lost their jobs in TV since the start of the recession, (compared to just 650 men). Not only were the numbers of women declining in the industry, but it was also noted there was steep drop in the number of women staying in the industry after the age of 35, and those who remained often struggled to progress to a more senior level. Our goal was to create an industry culture that supports and respects women throughout their careers so that they remain in the industry into their 30s, 40s, 50s and beyond.

Who was involved:

The scheme is run by Nicola Lees, who works two-days per week year round on the project, with some administrative support from the core WFTV team. The scheme is funded by a number of partners (which have changed over time); currently the sponsors include BBC, Channel 4, EON Productions, AVID, Lee & Thompson, Head Gear, Bankside Films and NBCUniversal International.

Shortlisting and interviewing of mentees is carried out by the scheme's producer along with a panel of volunteers from the WFTV Board and former mentors and mentees. Finding and selecting mentors is done solely by the scheme's producer.

Outcome:

At the time of writing six schemes have been completed and another is about to launch in February 2017, taking the total number of participants to 140. Over the course of six schemes mentees have: been promoted (some into international roles); set up their own companies; worked together professionally; commissioned work from each other; attended Cannes Film Festival and Sheffield Doc/Fest as a group; delivered one-hour seminars to the group and then gone on to speak on panels and at conferences and universities.

Progress is tracked through their application form, interview, induction day goal setting and progress reports completed at midpoint and end of the scheme. At the end of one scheme:

- 100% felt that they had advanced their career in some way (not necessarily as foreseen)
- 93% raised their professional profile (more contacts, press coverage, panels)
- 60% won more work (of the kind they wanted to do)
- 29% had negotiated a higher salary/fee
- 29% found new clients
- 14% had set up a new business (not necessarily foreseen)
- 14% got a new job¹

They also report that they are better able to:

- articulate what they want, and to ask for it
- set clearer boundaries so they can prioritise the work that they want to do
- deliberately step out of their comfort zone in order to challenge themselves
- embrace failure as both a possibility and a potential opportunity

In 2016, former mentees started organising twice-yearly alumni mixers, which will help sustain support and networking over the long term; others have become mentors themselves, either on the WFTV Scheme or for new entrants via other industry schemes, creating a virtuous ripple effect.

Quotes:

¹ They could choose more than one option so the figures don't add up to 100%

"One of the very best things that I have done for my career. It forced me to work on areas I had neglected - networking, contact building and focusing on long-term goals - and also allowed me to meet, bond and be a part of a new network with brilliant women." - Christiana Ebohon, Director, Mentee 2015

"It kicked me into 'business mode' - my knowledge of the freelancing world and industry as a whole has increased hugely and, with that, my confidence in 'selling myself' (a somewhat alien idea to me)." - Lucy Johnstone, Sound Editor, Mentee 2015

"The scheme forced me to stop, take stock and focus on what it is that tempted me into the industry in the first place... I felt less alone, regularly inspired and positively accountable." - Emma Smithwick, Head of Scripted Content, Mentee 2015

"Once you go through it, you can't turn back because you've made a commitment and you're accountable to the other mentees, your mentor and most of all yourself - that's very powerful." - Sofia Olins, Director, Mentee 2015

"This scheme is appropriate to ANYONE who is mid-career and needs to reconnect with themselves in some professional way. The creation of the supportive female network is inspired and definitely the best thing about the scheme." - Anita Gupta, Set Decorator/Production Buyer, Mentee 2015

"The mentoring scheme fosters an incredibly supportive and safe environment to openly identify obstacles (both professional and personal), push boundaries, learn new skills, ask questions and take risks." - Fleur Jago, Producer, Mentee 2014

"The mentoring scheme was really magical - it unfolded in both typical and surprising ways. I learned not only so much about the industry but also about myself. It was challenging and yet so much fun!" - Meghan Horvath, Director, Mentee 2013