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'Mentorship scheme launched for women in the arts', Interviews by Jennifer Tuckett  
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2016/apr/27/women-arts-opportunities-support-kate-bryan-tamara-rojo>

[University Women in the Arts](#) is a new scheme to mentor the next generation of female leaders. Launched recently at Drama Centre London at Central Saint Martins, the scheme will offer 10 female university students in the UK, at foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate level, the opportunity to meet and be mentored by some of the leading women in the UK arts scene.

Here, three mentors share their thoughts on being a female arts professional and offer some advice to women who want to work in the sector.

**Kate Bryan, art historian, presenter and former director of the Fine Art Society**

We need women to enter the workplace with an ambitious mindset. This is key. They also need to be fully-conscious of the challenges.

How tough is it going to be to get a job, get promoted, get noticed and make an impact? Women starting out in the arts need to believe that they have a value as an individual and that their success is part of a larger framework that depends on women empowering other women to create a balanced landscape.

There has been a significant shift in the past decade for all graduates. University is more costly and getting a foot in the door has become almost impossible without taking unpaid work. It worries me that young women from a less wealthy background like myself are going to become obsolete in the arts unless we put measures in place to help support them.

Low pay at entry level (which can now seem to last a lifetime) keeps the workforce less diverse in every respect. In my experience, it can often lead to people valuing themselves less and becoming subordinate – rather than prioritising their own career path. I've seen my female colleagues neglect their ambition for the sake of an institution they are passionate about, when they ought to be speaking up, moving up and enhancing the art world by demanding their proper place in it.

When I became director of the Fine Art Society I was conscious that I had a responsibility to make change happen in my own small sphere of influence. I was one of a handful of women in 124 years to obtain that position and I did it at a very young age. So I was determined to support other young women graduates.

Four years after I hired a keen graduate as an intern, she has become a specialist who manages the entire contemporary exhibition programme. Women must empower other women – and it works both ways. She empowered me as well and still does today, even after I have left the position.

**Tamara Rojo, artistic director, English National Ballet**

In some industries, businesses are putting quotas in place to say how many women they should be employing. I never used to be pro-quotas for women in dance. I always thought that success in dance was based on merit – that if you had the talent and worked hard, you would get the opportunities deserving of your talent and hard work.

But I've learned over the years that even if you are talented and give 100%, the opportunities you deserve are not always there for you. I realised that something had to be done – that I needed to go out and to create more opportunities, especially for women. Unless we create those opportunities, the world doesn't make them happen.

It's one of the reasons why I created She Said, a programme designed to give three talented female choreographers the opportunity to create new work for English National Ballet on the Sadler's Wells

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stage. I wanted to make work from the point of view of women, because in my whole career I had never been part of a new ballet created by a woman (maybe that was because there weren't enough opportunities for them).

So fight for those opportunities and value yourself. Don't underestimate your potential. And when you reach it, go out and create the opportunities for the next generation after you.

**Elizabeth Freestone, artistic director, Pentabus Theatre**

At entry level, the stats show that roughly equal numbers of men and women study the arts. At the emerging stage, when people begin to find work, it's again roughly equal. But it's the mid-career stage where the drop-off begins – and by the time you get to leadership level, men outnumber women two to one. This is for a variety of reasons – mostly to do with women not being offered the gigs and breaks their male peers are – and also includes pay and childcare.

We all benefit from the mentoring and guidance of peers and superiors at different points in our careers. A scheme such as this formalises that right from the start to help women find their feet, build their careers and take the world by storm.

I've been lucky enough to be supported by a number of brilliant women at various stages when I've been trying to find my feet. As a drama student I remember being completely blown away by Katie Mitchell's *Oresteia* at the National Theatre.

I had a friend who was an usher, so I got to watch the parts many times. Katie was often there, scribbling notes in a corner. I wrote a real fan-girl letter and left it at the stage door.

I got a postcard back saying: "Let's meet for coffee." She was patient, wise and generous (and still is). We all need mentors, whatever age or stage in our careers. It's about sharing knowledge, learning from mistakes, laughing at the nonsense and, mostly, knowing other people have got your back.

*Jennifer Tuckett is MA dramatic writing course leader at [Drama Centre London](#), Central Saint Martins, which co-runs University Women in the Arts.*