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## **Working together: Uniting screen educators and industry to support gender equality inside the academy and beyond**

March 04, 2022

*By Lucy Brown*

Strides have been made to tackle the lack of gender equality within the screen industry but despite this only 14% of all directors are women, 27% producers, 20% writers, 17% editors and 7% cinematographers –statistics that have barely changed in 20 years ([Calling the Shots](#)). These statistics speak to the situation in the UK, but this is a wider issue as reports from the likes of [Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film](#), [European Women's Audiovisual Network](#), [Screen Australia](#), and the [Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media](#) attest. Given that within tertiary education the gender balance on film courses is close to 50:50 this is extremely troubling. As an academic leader of film education courses, I'm invested in finding solutions.

Central to this mission is the need to bring the industry and academy together to further the conversation. All too often academic and industry events are separated and sit in silos.

[Women in Screen](#) was conceived as a result of my own experience of working in production, along with my time in higher education observing the student life cycle of women and their attempts to work their way up through the ranks of industry. I wanted to raise awareness and celebrate the tremendous women who are blazing a trail.

Women in Screen is a network which aims to bring together students, scholars, industry professionals and cultural bodies in the film, television, animation, games, sound, visual effects, and virtual reality sectors. At its core is the annual conference [Trailblazing Women On and Off Screen](#) (TWOOS) which started life as a symposium in 2017 at the University of

Greenwich, and has grown into a significant international event, partnering with organisations such as the [National Association for Higher Education in the Moving Image \(NAHEMI\)](#), [Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association \(MeCCSA\)](#), [Women's Film and Television History Network - UK/Ireland \(WFTHN\)](#), [Women in Film and TV](#) and the [Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media](#).

The conference consists of panels, keynotes, screenings, and practitioner led masterclasses on targeted areas where there is an underrepresentation of women. It takes a three-pronged approach to exploring the themes of women in front of and behind the screen past, present and future. 1) Encourages networking and supports students to navigate their careers in the sector. 2) Provides a vehicle for reflection and space to develop an inclusive curriculum. 3) Grows impactful research to advance the position of women in the screen industry.

It is important that the gender gap is acknowledged and discussed by staff and students within tertiary education in order to redesign courses and ensure they move beyond the existing canon.

Central to this mission is the need to bring the industry and academy together to further the conversation. All too often academic and industry events are separated and sit in silos. Consequently Women in Screen has worked with a wide range of institutions, companies, cultural bodies and campaign groups such as [Raising Films](#), [British Film Institute](#), [Women Over 50 Film Festival](#), [Intimacy on Set](#), [Intimacy for Stage and Screen](#), [Bird's Eye View](#), [Aesthetica Short Film Festival](#), [Women in Games](#), [OFCOM](#), the UK's communications regulator, [Directors UK](#), [BBC](#), [Writers Guild of GB](#) and [Equal Representation for Actresses](#) and this year we will be presenting at [SXSW EDU](#). The conference philosophy is to operate in a supportive, and inclusive way that is open to everyone regardless of age or background, rather than being an exclusive members club. Last year's conference which was held virtually attracted a diverse audience from six continents. This was certainly one of the benefits of covid and we are keen to find ways to continue to reach an international audience.

Conferences like this one can offer a valuable opportunity to hear first-hand accounts of women working in and around the sector that can form oral histories, providing opportunities for research and to develop inclusive and innovative curricula. It is important that the gender gap is acknowledged and discussed by staff and students within tertiary education in order to redesign courses and ensure they move beyond the existing canon.

These events also offer universities an opportunity to raise their profile and build strong external partnerships which in turn can provide routes to employment for students and mentorship opportunities. The benefits to academics include potential high profile research partnerships that engage the public and opportunities to advance professional development via shadowing industry specialists.

In my personal experience I have been greatly cheered by the number of students writing dissertations about forgotten female filmmakers or the representation of women, and seeing this research imbued in the diverse range of student films produced. I am also encountering more university applications that express a desire to use the medium of the moving image to tackle social injustice and the lack of equity in the industry and list the likes of Jane Campion, Gurinder Chadha, Michaela Coel, Ava DuVernay, Greta Gerwig, Céline Sciamma, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and many more trailblazing women as their influences. There's a lot of work to do but this fills me with joy for the next generation of screen creatives.

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**Lucy Brown** is Head of Division of Film and Associate Professor at London South Bank University. She has filmed around the world for the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Nickelodeon and Disney and has multiple BAFTA and RTS credits. Her 2021 documentary on *Thelma & Louise* screened at festivals worldwide including Venice, Toronto and Berlin, picking up Best Mobile Short and International Producer awards. Lucy is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Executive Board member for the National Association for Higher Education in the Moving Image and Founder of Women in Screen and the Trailblazing Women On and Off Screen conference. She is also co- author of *The TV Studio Production Handbook* (Bloomsbury).

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