



Accelerate

Balancing the talent pipeline

Food and Drink Industry Mentoring Programme

Organised by



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Accelerate Mentoring Programme

How do we improve our gender balance and support women and non-binary people to accelerate their careers to board level through mentoring?

Odgers Berndtson, Grant Thornton, and the FDF, are delighted to announce their partnership to tackle this industry wide issue.

The Accelerate Mentoring Programme is designed to promote and improve the gender balance at board level across the food and drink industry by supporting the accelerated development of female and non-binary leaders. Currently female and non-binary leaders occupy just 35.2% of board roles in FTSE 350 food and drink companies. Data is taken from 19 food and drink companies across food and drink manufacturing, casual dining and grocery retail industries. By harnessing the capability and influence of senior leaders in the industry, this mentoring programme aims to actively increase gender inclusion through stretching personal development and changing mindsets. When done well, we believe mentoring is a two-way process that should challenge both the mentors and the mentees.

Balancing the talent pipeline

Never has the world affecting food and drink manufacturers been subject to such disruptive change. To succeed in this environment, effective and representative leadership is critical. Enabling both mentees and mentors time to think, The Accelerate Mentoring Programme creates an environment that encourages openness, curiosity and ongoing learning. Our 11-month programme is designed to support female and non-binary leaders in senior management positions actively seeking progression to board level in their next move.

About the programme

This cross-company mentoring programme runs annually from September for 11 months. Using insights gathered during the application process, participants will be partnered with a mentor from a different organisation.

Mentoring is a confidential relationship that is established between two people. It provides two-way learning; generating creativity, innovation and developing transferable skills for both participants. For a mentee, the relationship aims to build greater ambition, allowing the opportunity and time to reflect and devise action plans that can support in achieving certain career related objectives. Mentors are challenged to see things from a different perspective and build empathy and insight beyond their regular network.

The benefits

Currently female and non-binary leaders occupy only 35.2% of board roles in FTSE 350 food and drink companies. This is even fewer in non-listed food and beverage companies. This programme aims to support female and non-binary leaders, from a diverse range of backgrounds, to develop to their full potential. It is well documented, that the benefits of mentoring are not limited to mentees alone.

Benefits include:

- Effective career planning, development and guidance.
- Providing an environment to evaluate strengths, development requirements, and priorities as a leader.
- Promoting effective networking which provides ongoing advice through peer relationships developed within the programme.
- Encouraging participants to see challenges and opportunities through a different perspective.
- Challenging thinking and unconscious bias to increase inclusivity and empathy of both mentors and mentees.

What makes a great mentee?

A high-achieving female and non-binary leader in a senior management position actively seeking progression to board level in their next move. They will:

- Be actively seeking career development.
- Have consistently progressed in both their seniority and capability throughout their career to date.
- Demonstrate an ability to engage, influence and lead others – both direct and indirect reports and peers.
- Have taken control of their own development, be a self-starter, who is hungry to learn and grow.
- Be passionate, not only about self-development and progression, but about the industry, business that they work for and the development of others.
- Be committed to meeting their mentor (either in person or virtually) once every six weeks for the duration of the 11-month mentoring programme.

What makes a great mentor?

Mentors can be male, female or non-binary leaders who hold board level roles either as an Executive, Non-Executive Director or as an Owner/Founder.

They will:

- Have fantastic listening skills.
- Be able to engage, influence and lead others, both direct and indirect reports and peers.
- Challenge their mentee with powerful questions.
- Know how to provide constructive feedback.
- When appropriate, draw upon their experience and share their knowledge with their mentee.
- Be committed to meeting their mentee (either in person or virtually) once every six weeks for the duration of the 11-month mentoring programme.



FAQs

Is there a cost to participate?

As passionate believers in the importance of gender parity, Odgers Berndtson, Grant Thornton, and the FDF are facilitating this programme free of charge.

What is the frequency of the sessions and how much time will I need to allow?

The programme is designed to fit around the demands of a challenging career. We recommend the mentor and mentee connect (either over the phone, via VC or face-to-face) every six weeks for the duration of the eleven month programme.

What is the sign-up process and closing date?

We require all mentors and mentees to sign up [HERE](#). You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire that will form the basis of our matching process.

For those mentors who have participated in the programme before, you may not need to sign up again unless you wish to change any of your details. Please contact the team via email: accelerate@odgersberndtson.com to discuss.

The closing date is Sunday 3rd August 2025.

How can I nominate someone for the programme?

We would welcome nominations of both mentors and mentees for the Accelerate Mentoring Programme. Please send an e-mail to accelerate@odgersberndtson.com to discuss further.

Are there any other guidelines?

We ask that both mentor and mentee show respect and confidentiality.

Any conflicts of interest within your Mentor/Mentee pairing should be raised via accelerate@odgersberndtson.com.

Get involved

Please sign up either as a mentor or mentee [HERE](#).

For further information please contact accelerate@odgersberndtson.com.

