Acknowledgements

- Chair of the Board and tonight’s moderator Ms Elizabeth Jameson
- Trustees
- Esteemed panellists including past Chair Dr Cherrell Hirst AO, BGGS Board of Trustees Non-Executive Director
- Ms Kathy Hirschfeld, Non-Executive Director
- Dr Sally Pitkin, Non-Executive Director, Super Retail Group Ltd and Adjunct Professor, The University of Queensland Business School
- Ms Kerryn Newton, Managing Director, Directors Australia
- Staff; parents; alumni; girls and guests.

Tonight I acknowledge the Turrabul and Yuggera clans who are the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet and recognise the special connection their descendants retain with its lands and waters.

With International Women’s Day 2014 on the horizon, I’m delighted to see so many of you here this evening, eager to harness the wisdom and expertise of the impressive panel of women assembled tonight in relation to board participation.

International Women’s Day has been marked around the world for more than a century, and officially by the United Nations for close to 40 years.¹ The UN has designated the theme for the 2014 celebrations as: “Equality for women is progress for all.”²

I believe that events like the one we’re holding tonight can make a valuable contribution to this conversation. It can plant the seed of possibility, open up minds to opportunity and create an environment of comradery and support that empowers women to challenge and extend themselves, to contribute in important ways, and to thrive.

Last year, an Australian Council of Superannuation Investors study on the participation of women on boards reported that women had broken through the elusive ‘100’ mark—105 women occupied 144 roles on the boards of Australia’s top 100 companies in 2012.³

That result means that women held just more than 18 per cent of all ASX 100 board seats—the highest level since the survey began 12 years prior. And while unsurprisingly, the best-paid boardroom seats are still occupied by men and there currently 42 boards in the ASX 200 that still do not have any women⁴, change is coming, just at a little slower rate than many of us had hoped.

¹ http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp#.UxKqEfSSxqc
² http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/international-womens-day
And this change must be sustained and permeate workplace and everyday Australian culture, so it becomes a given.

The Australian Institute of Company Directors also recognises that this change must be sustained, both in terms of board recruitment and selection practices, as well as the promotion of women in senior management to provide the ‘pipeline’ to board roles. They acknowledge that ‘women are committed to achieving board roles based on merit but need to be given the opportunity to build their skills and present their experience.’

During her time as Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton once famously said, ‘Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world.’ And that it was, ‘time for women to take their rightful place, side by side with men, in the rooms where the fates of peoples, where their children’s and grandchildren’s fates, are decided’.

And while I emphatically agree with this sentiment, the challenge for many young, talented women, like those of you in the room tonight, is in finding the answer to the elusive question of, “how?”

The pathways to these decision-making positions are not clearly marked and while there has been a significant and concerted effort by our government to create mandatory targets and prioritise women’s rightful place on the boards that govern our country and our corporations, finding the way to the seats at that table remains unclear.

But there is a wind of change, and an increasing number of supportive conversations on this subject are taking place both here and around the world, and the more emphasis women, media, business, and the community in general give this topic, the more it will become a natural part of our culture.

Programs providing executive leadership have been around for more than 40 years at prestigious American universities such as Harvard, Northwestern and Stanford, but programs targeted specifically to women are now on the rise, not to mention the ‘Negotiation Academy for Women’ at Carnegie Mellon, which launched last year.

Then there’s Harvard Business School social psychologist Amy Cuddy whose TedTalk on boosting confidence and gaining a quick competitive edge through "Power Posing" – has been viewed nearly 10 million times. And while I’m not going to ask you all to stand and strike a power pose, I do think that these examples are indicative of a growing appetite among women for the knowledge and skills that will guide them along their paths to leadership.

And that is at the heart of this event—tonight we’ll have an opportunity to hear from some trailblazing Australian women in relation to board participation. As Principal of an all girls school and a strong advocate for girls, I cannot underestimate the importance we place on providing our girls, and those who came before them, with strong, positive images and stories of women who are achieving in many and diverse ways.

But finally tonight, I would like to acknowledge and extend a particularly warm welcome to the men in the room. Your presence is testament to the United Nation’s ‘Equality for women is progress for all’ theme.

Last year I read Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*—and I’m sure I’m not alone. Many of the things Sandberg said resonated with me, but this quote feels particularly apt for tonight:

> “The more women help one another, the more we help ourselves. Acting like a coalition truly does produce results. Any coalition of support must also include men, many of whom care about gender inequality as much as women do.”

So thank you so much for coming tonight—please enjoy the discussion and take inspiration from these remarkable role models before us. For now, I will pass the proceedings over to Elizabeth Jameson.