I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge our co-chairs Associate Professor Peter McGraw and Melanie O’Connor, Managing Director of the Academy Network and my fellow speakers Heather Ridout and Mark Lennon.

Seeing our first female Governor General standing on the steps of Government House with our first female Prime Minister last month symbolised the progress we have made.

At the federal election on 10 December 1977 – not a single woman was elected to the House of Representatives.

Thirty years later – on 24 November 2007 – 40 women were elected.
And now one of them is Prime Minister.

I can think of no better way to encourage young women and girls at school today to keep motivated and stay focused on their goals.

Elsewhere in our society – such as the justice system, women’s representation is also improving.

Three out of our seven High Court Justices are now women, we have a female Chief Justice of the Federal Family Court and the Victorian Chief Justice is a woman.

As in other areas, this judicial success is hard won.

When Ada Evans wanted to enrol in law at Sydney University in 1899 she was told she did not have the ‘physique’ for law.

She managed to get in when the chauvinistic Dean of the law school was overseas, and through sheer persistence obtained her degree.

She was refused registration on the grounds there was ‘no precedent’ for women lawyers.

Moreover, the legislation at the time ruled that ‘persons’ could be lawyers but women could not because they were not defined as persons!\(^1\)

The situation is also improving in the upper echelons of the Australian Public Service.

Women are dispersed across all levels of the APS and now hold 37 per cent of all Senior Executive Service positions, as well as three female departmental heads.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Justice Mary Gaudron, speech to the Women Lawyers Association of NSW, 13 June 2002.
Yet as much as these successes provide for optimism, they by no means suggest the battle for equality in the workplace has been won.

The number of women on boards and in executive management positions has declined to the point that Australia now trails the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand.

There is reason to be optimistic for the future.

While women still comprise only 9.5 per cent of directors on ASX 200 boards – a quarter of all director appointments to ASX 200 boards in 2010 have been women.

In total 28 women have been appointed as directors so far in 2010 – compared to only 10 in the whole of last year.

While only 136 of the 1,425 director positions on ASX 200 boards are filled by women – this number is increasing.

And there are now six female chairs and six female managing directors on the boards of ASX200 companies.³

There’s no doubt that success in navigating the leadership maze depends a lot on personal drive, commitment and skill.

Yet we know that’s not the whole story.

Success also relies on a supportive culture – both at the corporate and community level.

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² Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service* reports
³ Australian Institute of Company Directors, Board Diversity Data
A supportive culture allows women to strike a balance between the professional careers and their home lives and to change that balance over their lives.

Any discussion of directions in the world of work needs to think about how we all meet our obligations in the home.

I believe that women and men ought to be supported to make the choices that are right for their families.

The role of Government is to make sure that both women and men have genuine choices open to them.

Many women are unable to obtain the flexible working arrangements they need to stay in paid work as well as caring for their children and other family members.

The consequences don’t just limit the number of women in leadership – the economic effects are also telling.

Around 60 per cent of Australian women are in the workforce.

This is low by international standards.

According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2009, Australia was ranked 50th internationally on women’s labour force participation relative to men’s.\(^4\)

In the Work Futures report by Skills Australia – which includes experts such as Heather (Ridout) – many women say that they don’t work, or work less than they


would like, because it is too difficult to combine work and family or because it is too hard to get back into work after starting a family.

It is too simple to say that this is because many women are choosing to stay out of the workforce.

Many would prefer to have a career and be a parent.

Many women are looking for promotions and leadership positions either now or as their children get a bit older.

I think that is also true of many men.

Increasingly men are adopting more flexible work practices to get a better balance between their work and family lives.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that the proportion of fathers who adapt their work arrangements to accommodate child care increased from 26 per cent in 1996 to 41 per cent in 2008.

Thirty per cent of fathers are now using flexible working hours to help spend more time with their families – nearly double the 16 per cent of fathers who reported doing this in 1996.

And where nearly three quarters of fathers did not adjust their working arrangements for child care in 1996 – the proportion had fallen to 58 per cent by 2008.\(^5\)

This is an important social trend – and as a society we need to do what we can to encourage it.

\(^5\) Australian Bureau of Statistics, Childhood Education and Care Survey
More and more men want to enjoy a strong bond with their children and are looking for work arrangements that allow that to happen.

The Federal Labor Government’s approach has been to support Australian women and men to have a choice.

Labor has introduced Australia’s first Paid Parental Leave scheme – a clear win for working women and men.

Paid Parental Leave helps working families during those critical early months, giving parents time and financial support to spend time with their new baby.

Paid Parental Leave will help women stay connected to the workforce and their careers when they have children.

The Federal Labor Government’s scheme is fully funded – it’s money in the bank for new parents starting on 1 January next year.

Families who have a baby on or after 1 January 2011 will receive up to 18 weeks pay, at the national minimum wage, which is $570 per week before tax.

And unlike Mr Abbott’s plan – the Federal Labor Government’s scheme is not a new tax on business – and will not be passed on to mums and dads through higher prices.

Mothers and fathers will receive the same amount of money under our scheme – unlike Mr Abbott’s alternative that discriminates against dads.

The Federal Labor Government has also restored fairness to the workplace through the Fair Work Act – making it easier for women and men to balance their work and family lives:
We have repealed the previous government’s Work Choices laws – laws that were bad for working women.

Full time women workers on Australian Workplace Agreements took home on average $87.40 per week less than their colleagues working on collective agreements.

The Fair Work Act has established an employment safety net that can’t be undercut.

We now have an annual minimum wage review process that fairly balances economic and social factors – factors that led to this year’s $26 a week increase in the minimum wage, compared to last year’s pay freeze.

The Federal Labor Government has also extended the equal remuneration provisions in the Fair Work Act – a clear win for women workers.

The new right for parents to request flexible working arrangements, such as changes in hours of work, changes to the pattern of work or changes in the location of work will help parents balance their work and family lives.

The Federal Labor Government is also making significant new investments in child care.

When the previous government was in office, Australia was 13th out of 14 OECD countries in terms of public expenditure on early childhood education.

The Federal Labor Government is investing more than $17 billion for early childhood education and child care over four years – $10 billion more than provided in the last four years of the previous government.

We have increased the Child Care Rebate to 50 per cent of out of pocket expenses.
We increased the amount that parents can claim under the rebate – to $7,500 per year, per child.

We now pay this money quarterly rather than forcing parents to wait up to two years for it, as was the case under the previous government.

As a result of these changes, child care costs to parents fell by over 20 per cent.\(^6\)

A family earning $80,000 with one child in full time care now receives $2,239 more a year in Child Care Rebate than they would have under the previous government.

Under a re-elected Gillard Labor Government parents will have the choice of receiving their Child Care Rebate fortnightly should they wish to do so.

Again – money in the bank for working parents.

The Federal Labor Government’s reforms to superannuation will deliver substantial improvements in women’s retirement savings.

A woman aged 30 now on average weekly earnings with a broken work pattern will have an extra $78,000 upon their retirement.

The Government has also responded to the report of the Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Sex Discrimination Act.

The Act has now been in place for over 25 years and has been an important tool in addressing discrimination and changing attitudes.

New amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act will ensure the protections from discrimination apply equally to women and men.

\(^6\) Australian Bureau of Statistics, Consumer Price Index
No one should suffer discrimination for the choices they make about arranging work and family.

Breastfeeding protections are also being introduced.

Unlike our opponents – the party of Work Choices – the Federal Labor Government is putting the right supports in place to help women and men to make their own choices about their work and family lives.

Another key initiative to boost women’s leadership in Australia’s top companies is a Board Diversity Scholarship program, equipping board-ready women with formal accreditation through the Company Directors Course.

**Today I announce that a re-elected Gillard Labor Government will provide scholarships for at least 70 women to undertake Australian Institute of Company Directors courses that will set them up to join private sector boards.**

The scholarships will be provided in partnership with the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will provide $200,000 over two years, to be matched dollar for dollar by the AICD.

Scholarship recipients will be able to attend either the Company Directors Course or Mastering the Boardroom Directors Course.

Recipients will be drawn from the private, not for profit and public sectors.

The scholarships will be allocated by representatives of the Office for Women and the AICD.
We know that there are many talented women who would make an outstanding contribution to Australian boards who are not currently being considered. This program will provide women with new skills and put them in the mix when shortlists are being drawn up to fill vacancies.

It will help to ensure that the proportion of new women directors being appointed for boards continues to increase in the future.

Yet clearly Australian Boards are still a long way short of community expectations. At the National Rural Women’s Summit two years ago, my colleague Tony Burke said:

“When boards keep appearing before me with about 20 to 25 per cent female representation, I find it really hard to believe that the selection has been done purely on merit.

I am not interested in imposing formal quotas on selection committees, but at the same time ... selection on merit simply cannot be occurring when women are so consistently and so blatantly underrepresented on almost every single board that is meant to be advising me.

It just can’t be right.”

And of course it is not right.

Today I announce that a re-elected Gillard Labor Government will adopt a target for Government Boards that at least 40 per cent of Government board members should be women and 40 per cent of members should be men.
The remaining 20 per cent will be either women or men.

We aim to achieve this target within five years.

We will do this because the Federal Labor Government believes that it should lead by example.

Both government and the private sector are stronger when they represent our whole community – which naturally enough includes women.

By getting more women into leadership positions in the public sector – we can help to transform the nature of advice provided to government.

To reach this goal we will need access to the widest possible field of quality candidates for consideration for appointments and for that the selection of board members needs to maintain a high level of transparency.

Working to a target of 40 per cent women, 40 per cent men and 20 per cent unallocated will help to achieve these goals.

The Federal Labor Government’s achievements for women since 2007 make me optimistic about the world of work in 2020.

Yet we still face significant challenges – which of course the Government cannot tackle on its own.

Changes to workplace relations, tax, superannuation and sex discrimination laws cannot, of themselves, deliver equal opportunities for women either on the shop floor or in the board room.
Real change occurs when business itself takes action to promote women and make their organisation more family-friendly.

Women who work in senior management positions, like so many of you here today, are at the vanguard of cultural change in business.

Not only do you send a positive message about the culture of an organisation but you also inspire other women to follow your lead.

Just like having a female Prime Minister will do.

It is a credit to the tireless commitment of Peter and his staff at Macquarie University’s Labour Studies Management Foundation that this conference continues to be so successful in bringing together talented and successful women who can inspire others.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

ENDS