

Girls hear a message of power and



Top: PLC students Esther Choi, Amy Jarvis, Tara Narayan, Monique Hore and Amber Cai; below, the audience enjoyed a lively discussion, with plenty of questions for the panel; right, Emma Reidy, Mia De Riz, moderator Caroline Overington, Marguerite Andrews and Mia Campbell



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School, university, jobs. These were top of the agenda when *The Australian* held a special panel discussion for senior girls at Pymble Ladies' College in Sydney. The paper's associate editor **Caroline Overington** moderated the event, which included questions from the floor to the panel of **Caroline Gurney**, managing director, marketing and communications, Asia Pacific, UBS; **Dr Jessamy Tiffen**, a research scientist from the Centenary Institute of Cancer Medicine and Cell Biology; and PLC principal **Dr Kate Hadwen**. This is an edited transcript of the event

'Have a go, just try. Try everything. I went through multiple jobs at the very beginning until I found what I wanted to do, and thank goodness I did'

CAROLINE GURNEY
UBS

Tell us about your work? What does your day look like?

JT: I'm a scientist and have a PhD. I am interested in melanoma. I lead a small group and we're trying to figure out exactly how it works at the genetic level. And then we try to figure out how we can stop it. So, we're trying to come up with new drugs and new treatments to try and solve it.

Do you wear a lab coat?

JT: Yes. I wear a lab coat. I wear safety goggles. I've got the gloves. I've got the whole outfit.

CG: My job changes all the time. I am responsible for communications and that can be communicating to employees, telling them about what's happened. So, for example, recently, all I've concentrated on is coronavirus; talking to our staff, to press, to people externally to find out about it and how it's actually going to impact Australia. Originally I wanted to be an economist. I did an economics degree but I realised that financial modelling (while I could do it) meant that I didn't necessarily talk to people. So, I went into marketing.

What was it that attracted you to girls' education, Kate?

KH: I'm super passionate about girls and women in the workforce and that's what drove me into girls' education. It's where I want to be for the rest of my life — promoting, supporting, getting women to understand their beauty within, their power. What's special about being a woman and how you can use those strengths to achieve your goals. One of the things that really drives me (relates to) C-suite jobs — a term meaning CEOs, managing directors and so on. We hear a lot about statistics of women on boards, but what we don't hear so much about is that when women are in their mid-20s, for example, the gender disparity in promotion is greater than any other level after that.

Your thoughts on leadership?

JT: There's no shortage of girls to participate in science, in high school and university, but once you get to the really top positions — the professors, the directors and CEOs of biotech companies — there's a massive shortage of

women who are making it to those top positions. It's really important to identify what is stopping women from getting there. At the Centenary Institute we have a gender inclusion committee, something that wouldn't have existed 10 years ago. And one of our major objectives is to identify what those barriers are and try and make changes, to introduce new policies to address those barriers and help promote female scientists.

What skills do women need to show in order to get to the top?

CG: What we don't do well is actually see what the business is that we're actually in. So, we're learning all these fantastic leadership skills and how to nurture a group to think, but we're actually not understanding what the strategy of that business is and how the little bits fit into that big picture. If you ask a guy what he thinks of his position, he would say, "my leadership skills". And then you say, what about your understanding of the balance sheet? What about your understanding of the way the platforms work in the business? (A guy would say) "well that's a given". Women don't talk about the business as much as they should because even though they know it, they just don't think it's the right thing to talk about.

What advice would you give to young women about managing their careers?

KH: Childcare is one of the biggest impediments in this country, in terms of the success of women. Certainly, if we look at the Nordic block, for example, and their childcare system and compare that with Australia, it's a far cry from where we need to be. But I would encourage you when you do take time out to have your family, make sure you stay connected with your career. Continue to work even if it's one day a week. Manage your career. In education we spend a lot of time talking about resilience. Because resilience will teach you how to bounce back. I want to teach you how to step forward. How to be courageous. How to be brave. It's a different take on resilience. I'm not sure there are lots of conversations about resilience in every boys' school, so I think we need to spin that a bit in girls' schools.

I'm interested in the idea of working part-time while you're in high school. What's your feeling about that Kate?

KH: We actually spent last week modelling out what the future of Pymble might look like, timetable wise, so we can offer more experiential opportunities to girls. But I'd like to think that perhaps maybe in Year 12, you have one day a fortnight, where if you're interested in business, you go and work at (a company) one day a fortnight and we manage all of your studies around that so that when you finish school, you have a direct link to your organisation. It might be that you want to be a fashion designer, so we'll find you a placement there. The biggest challenge I think now is actually getting a job. It's not getting into university. It's that transition from university to the world of work. So, how do we give Pymble girls an edge up?

A lot of girls are interested in science, but they don't understand what the jobs are.

JT: I do think there's a lot of mystery as to what happens after you leave university and what the pathway is. So, it's really important to seek advice from women. I did a three-year graduate degree in biomedical science, and then a one-year honours degree. After that I decided to work for a couple of years. I got a job in a laboratory as a research assistant and that was great. Going back on the job learning, that was where I picked up all the practical skills and techniques as opposed to learning about it in textbooks. After two years of that, I wasn't really satisfied with being somebody else's assistant and having them come up with all the ideas and drive the project. I decided I wanted to do that, to come up with my own ideas and do my own experiments. That inspired me to do a PhD — another three and half years at Sydney University. That was how I got to where I am.

Do you think women need to operate differently in the workplace to get ahead?

JT: I don't feel like I have to try to act like a man to get ahead, but in saying that, I've definitely been very observant of anybody who's in a position that I aspire to be and try and learn from their behaviour

resilience from women leaders



Left to right, panellists Caroline Gurney of UBS; PLC principal Kate Hadwen; and Jessamy Tiffen of the Centenary Institute

as to what works for them and how they manage situations.

CG: If you're not true to yourself, then you're never really going to be happy. And I think that workforces are changing and are far more diverse. They're looking for different ways of looking at issues and problems and being more creative as a group.

Lots of people believe women need a push to be successful, so

how do you think we can change the perspective on that?

KH: Get out there and do it. That's how we change the perspective, just do it. Do what you're doing now and go for those opportunities. I understand the importance of presence, of choosing how you show up and I think that's how you get to whatever you're doing. Work damn hard, understand what you're good at. Just keep turning up and being you. Being

amazing as you go out to the world will start to change those statistics.

Do you think that a woman who's staying in the kitchen and being a full-time mother is not reaching their full potential?

KH: I'd love to see women support other women's choices. It's awesome that you've got a career, but it's awesome that somebody else has chosen to sacrifice their wage and their ability to progress in

those years, to stay home with their children. So, every choice is valid.

JT: In my industry unfortunately, the code is publish or perish, so that means we have to regularly be generating new knowledge and put it out there into the world and that is a measure of our success and how we get our funding for our projects. So, we've got to have a good track record of publications to keep bringing the money in, to

keep doing the experiments. And so, I was really worried about the impact of taking time off when I had my first baby, what impact it was going to have on my track record. But I also felt really strongly about wanting to be with my daughter at such a young age. So, I ended up taking eight months off and we arranged a replacement for me to do the experiments while I was off. The project kept going so I didn't really lose any time at all.

We just recently submitted the results of that study. You know, it's going to be published soon and it was fine. I didn't need to stress out so much about it.

What do you say to girls who have no idea what they want to do after school?

KH: Life is a journey. Have a crack at every single opportunity that you get. It doesn't matter that you don't know. I started with a bach-

elor of business. That was where I was heading and I changed my pathway. Just be excellent at whatever you're doing now, because if you're excellent at what you're doing now, that will help you get to where you're going in the future.

CG: There are so many things out there and you really don't know about all of them. Know what you don't want to do and then rule that out. Then find people in the sectors that you're interested in and go

talk to them. See what makes them tick. See whether or not you could imagine yourself being in that role in the next five years. Have a go, just try. Try everything. I went through multiple jobs at the very beginning until I found what I wanted to do, and thank goodness I did, because I might've been stuck in a job that I really disliked and then I would not perhaps have reached what I wanted to reach as my potential.

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Dr Niloofar Vaghefi
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Dr Alison McCarthy
Senior Research Fellow
(Irrigation and Cropping Systems)

Dr Alison McCarthy's research is delivering the next generation of autonomous irrigation systems that have the potential to save agricultural producers millions of dollars in water, nitrogen and labour costs. Australian farmers are among the first in the world to benefit from this revolutionary technology that is shaping the farm of the future.



Dr Yuwei Ma
Research Fellow
(Geopolymer Concrete)

Dr Yuwei Ma is driving the "green concrete" revolution by converting reactive industrial waste into sustainable geopolymer concrete and cement. Dr Ma is working with industry to progress the large-scale production of geopolymer concrete to reduce the amount of industrial raw waste that ends up in landfill and deliver a huge environmental saving.

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