

## **Vanessa Vallely OBE, Hon Doctor of Science**

**Friday 19 July am**

Provost

Our honorary graduand this morning is one of the UK's most prominent figures in gender equality. I am delighted to introduce: VANESSA VALLELY.

Vanessa left school at the age of 16 and headed out for a job in the City of London. In 2008, at the height of her successful career in financial services, she held senior roles in nine financial institutions. That is when Vanessa founded WeAreTheCity.com, a network to help women progress and excel in their careers – a 'one-stop shop' of information and resources for professional women. But Vanessa does so much more than building networks. She builds relationships and communities and encourages women to go on their own journey.

At first, it was a hobby. She set up WeAreTheCity out of frustration at the lack of networking and skilling events for women, with no one pulling together all the different opportunities women could use to further their careers. WATC runs learning events and conferences, hosts highly regarded award programmes, and provides free access to resources, including careers and educational advice. She focused, in particular, on

the middle layers of female leaders and works with both women *and* men to foster women's careers and their development.

After a few years, Vanessa 'gave up the day job' to run the networking business full-time. What started as a side hustle grew into an award-winning organisation that has an impressive 80,000 female members and helps over 100 companies to retain and develop their female talent.

In 2009, Vanessa co-founded The Network of Networks for Gender (now Gender Networks) – a UK-wide diversity forum, which brings together diversity leaders from different industries and sectors to share best practices.

In 2015 came WeAreTechWomen to help women grow in technology, an industry very close to Vanessa's heart.

Vanessa also helps to raise the profile of women in the workplace through her Rising Star Awards - and WBS is proud to be the education sponsor of this award. And there are also TechWomen100 and Trailblazer50 awards. A of these awards honour and shine a light on women's successes and contributions that otherwise would remain unseen.

In 2013, she published *Heels of Steel*, which shares best practices and insights into how to succeed in the workplace.

Vanessa provides guidance to corporate organisations who seek to attract, develop and maintain their female talent, and to government, as a member of the Digital Advisory Board. She has won over 23 industry awards, and in 2018 was awarded the OBE for services to women and the economy.

Vanessa is passionate about educating the current and future female workforce. She speaks in schools, providing practical advice and inspiring girls to reach their full potential and, particularly, to consider careers in technology. She has also been invited to speak at WBS on numerous occasions and we hope she will continue to do so.

Vanessa is a changemaker and trailblazer. Vanessa's professionalism, confidence, generosity, and warmth are infectious. And maybe even more importantly, those who know her say she is incredibly supportive to those around her, she champions people even when they're not in the room and gives credit where credit is due.

Starting more or less from scratch in 2008, when gender was not on the mainstream agenda, she has made an enormous contribution to diversity and inclusion, putting gender equality firmly on the map. A venture that started as a 'passion project' has become a national asset. We are delighted to welcome her to the Warwick graduate community today.

Provost: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, VANESSA VALLELY.