

Russo's job empire takes on the world

Daryl Passmore

SARINA Russo's job placement, recruitment and education empire is expanding overseas.

The entrepreneur has won a contract from the British Government to open seven offices in the United Kingdom, following the success of fellow Queenslander Therese Rein, whose Ingeus group operates in several European countries.

The international initiative is an important milestone for Ms Russo, 58, who on Thursday will celebrate 30 years since she set up in business.

She had no idea that running typing courses for nine students in a top-floor grotty room in Brisbane's Albert St would grow into an \$80 million business and make her one of the state's wealthiest women. "All I wanted to do was pay my bills," she said.

She now employs more than 1000 people across six business divisions, with sites in Queensland and Victoria.

"It's been a very exciting journey - phenomenal," she said. "I had more confidence and resilience than I understood when I started out."

Ms Russo, who migrated to Australia with her family from

Sicily as a child, decided to start her own business after being sacked from a series of secretarial jobs. "I thank every boss who fired me because they inspired me to become who I am today," she said.

"I hope I have inspired some people that it does not matter what education you have had or how many times you have been fired, but having a winning attitude that matters."

One of her new projects aims to boost entrepreneurship in the developing world by

funding a \$100,000 scholarship to bring leaders from Nepal to Australia for training and mentoring. The first seven participants will arrive in Queensland this week.

"I've developed a lot of gratitude and want to make a difference so we've decided to make this investment in Nepal," said Ms Russo.

"We are committed to helping educate and support people so they can go back stronger and make a greater contribution."



SUCCESS: Sarina Russo near her Brisbane HQ and (above) starting in business in 1979. Main picture: **Campbell Scott**



Split on gender quota

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PREMIER Anna Bligh has challenged business to follow the Government in setting targets to boost the number of women on boards.

But some of the state's most successful women say while they support moves to encourage greater female representation, setting targets or quotas could be counter-productive and seen as tokenistic.

The State Government has committed to raising the proportion of women on government-appointed

boards from the current 36 per cent to 50 per cent. Of the latest 200 positions, 56 were filled by women.

"We want to smash the glass ceiling in boardrooms across the state and I make no apologies for taking affirmative action to do that," Ms Bligh said yesterday.

Certainly, the corporate world lags far behind. Only nine of Queensland's 50 biggest companies has a female director on their board. Surfwear company Billabong leads the way with two.

A study by the Federal Government's

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency last year found males outnumbered females 12 to one on the boards of the ASX200 companies. The situation had worsened in the past two years.

Only four of the country's top 200 firms are chaired by women and four had a female CEO, including Nicole Hollows at Brisbane-based mining giant Macarthur Coal.

Else Shepherd, who chairs the government-owned Powerlink, said: "There's a lot of talk but not much action (in the corporate world)."

She praised the Government's efforts and said Scandinavian countries had passed laws to ensure that every board - government or corporate - had at least 40 per cent representation from each gender.

Leeanne Bond, whose board roles include Tarong Energy, supports targets. "In business, what gets measured gets done," she said.

One idea might be for boards to add a woman to their existing directors, she said.

But Rhonda White, who co-founded and jointly runs the Terry

White Chemist chain, said: "I'm very strong on the fact that women should earn their position on boards. I'm not keen on governments setting quotas and so on."

Entrepreneur Sarina Russo said: "The glass ceiling is a myth. It's not about gender but capacity."

Susan Rix, a partner with accountants BDO Kendalls, said she was sceptical of setting targets. "I think it's about having the skills set. There's no point having women on boards because you want to make up the numbers so it looks good."

GOVERNMENT

Ann Sherry: Chairwoman of Queensland's Public Service Commission and CEO of Carnival Australia cruise line.

Else Shepherd: An electrical engineer, she chairs the government-owned energy corporation Powerlink.

Leeanne Bond: A director of the government-owned Tarong Energy Corporation and the government's Board of Professional Engineers. A chemical engineer, she's a director of Breakthrough Energy.

Susan Rix: A chartered accountant and partner with BDO Kendalls, Ms Rix is a director of Queensland Rail and the Port of Brisbane Corporation.

Bronwyn Morris: A director of Queensland Investment Corporation, Stanwell Corporation and Brisbane Marketing, Ms Morris is a former chair of Queensland Rail.

Jennifer Neales: A landscape architect and managing director of Vivo Design, Ms Neales is on

the government's Building and Development Tribunal.

Susan Forrester: A director of Ergon Energy, Ms Forrester (pictured) is chief executive of the CEO Institute. She trained as a banking and finance lawyer.

Lyn Gearing: A director of Queensland Investment Corporation, Ms Gearing is former CEO of Australia's largest superannuation fund, State Super. She is on the boards of IMB and Hancock Natural resource group.

Julie Whitehead: A partner in the Minter Ellison law firm, Ms Whitehead is on the government's Architects Board.

Julie Beeby: Ms Beeby was appointed to the board of government-owned Powerlink last September. She is general manager of strategic planning with Peabody Pacific.



PUBLIC COMPANIES

Nicole Hollows: The only managing director of an ASX 200 company in Queensland, she leads the Macarthur Coal in the resources sector.

Nerolie Withnall: Sits on the boards of three public companies - Campbell Bros, Pan Australian resources and Alchemia Ltd, as well as chairing privately-owned QM Technologies.

Lady Winifred Kamit: A board member of Queensland's second biggest listed company, Lihir Gold, she is a former Commissioner of Public Services in PNG.

Margaret Jackson: A director of surf-wear giant Billabong International, Ms Jackson is also on the ANZ bank board and is a former Qantas chairwoman.

Colette Paul: One of the earliest employees of Billabong in the 1970s, and a significant shareholder, she has been involved in the global growth of the firm.

Michelle McKellar: A board member of property trusts and

fund manager Cromwell, Ms McKellar has senior positions with property holdings including shopping centres.

Cherrell Hirst: A director of Queensland's biggest public company Suncorp Metway, Dr Hirst (pictured) also chairs listed biotechnology firm Peplin Inc and is Chancellor of QUT.

Frances McLeod: A director and chief operating officer of the Wide Bay Australia building society, one of Queensland's top 30 public companies.

Prof Judith Sloan: A director of Carindale Property Trust and the Westfield Group among others. Also a member of the Productivity Commission and Australian Fair Pay Commission.

Sue Palmer: A director of Maryborough Sugar, Ms Palmer is a chartered accountant who works as general manager finance for Leighton Contractors.



PRIVATE FIRMS

Therese Rein: Founder of the Brisbane-based Ingeus Group which is enjoying huge growth in Europe, and wife of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

Sarina Russo: Owner of a recruitment and training empire employing more than 1000 people and consummate networker.

Rhonda White: Co-founder and managing director of the Terry White Chemist chain of pharmacies.

Jane Hughes: Half of a husband and wife team, with Peter, which is behind fastest-growing beef cattle operation in Queensland.

Christina Quinn: Joint managing director, with husband Tony, of VIP Petfoods, now the third biggest petfood producer in the country.

Louise Loh: She and her husband Richard Loh run Robina Land Corporation, developing the Gold Coast suburb.

Raynuha Sinnathamby: Raynuha (pictured) is deputy managing director of Springfield Land Corporation, founded by her father Maha, which is developing Queensland's first privately-built city.

Lynne Pask: Unit development manager with one of the state's biggest developers, the Pask group, established by her father Nev.

Marlene Newcombe: Co-founder and director of Newcombes Holdings, the state's 14th largest private firm with a string of vehicle dealerships employing 300 people.

Laurie Fraser-Scott: Partner with husband Robert in hotels and property development. It's now in Queensland's top 25 private companies.

