Smart Specialisation Business Higher Level Skills

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**Summary Women in Tech Event**

**Weds 25th May 2022**

**Venue:** Fibre Hub Pool

**Attendees:** 25 (mix Individuals and Businesses)

**25 O1s/10 Co23s**

**Intro;** in collaboration with Cornwall College and the Digital Skills Partnership this event was held to address the following questions:

* **How do employers attract more women into tech?**
* **What skills, existing and new, are needed in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly?**

This event was aimed at exploring how tech employers (SMEs/individuals) in Cornwall can attract women into their vacant roles.  To hear from leading industry speakers about what they have done, what works and what doesn’t. Exploring and discussing what is needed across Cornwall to get more women applying for tech roles; whether this be encouraging them at a young age, enrolling them onto degrees or short courses, or communicating that technical roles are not the only way into a tech career.

**Agenda**

10:00 Arrival coffee & networking

10:30 Keynote: Debbie Forster MBE

11:00 Lightning talks from industry figures:

* Allanah Armondi, Director of People and Culture, Thought Quarter
* Caitlin Gould, Co-Founder, Kensa Health; Co-Founder, TECgirls; SETsquared Cornwall EiR; Chair of the Digital Skills Partnership Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
* Jenna Saberton, Curriculum Development Manager in Aero, Engineering and Marine for TCCG; Self Employed Lean Manufacturing Engineer

11:30 Huddles: Topic Group Discussion & Feedback

12:30 Networking Lunch hosted by TEC Women

13:30 Panel discussion with Q&A

14.00 Close

**Speakers**



**Chloe Rickard**

**Digital Skills Partnership Coordinator for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**

Our Facilitator on the day, Chloe represents the Digital Skills Partnership at Cornwall Council. This flagship DCMS initiative aims to develop digital skills to meet the needs of Cornwall’s economy and community.

Prior to her current role, Chloe spent a decade working in digital communications for the creative and charity sector. She was Head of Communications & Development for Kneehigh Theatre Company and delivered digital marketing and fundraising for Cool Earth.

She is passionate about the transformative power of digital skills, especially for underserved communities. Chloe says:

*“There is huge untapped potential in the women of Cornwall. Our tech sector is growing faster than any other in the south west and if we’re going to solve the growing recruitment squeeze we need to harness that potential sooner rather than later. There couldn’t be a better time to figure out how to encourage more women and girls into tech careers”*



**Debbie Forster MBE**

**CEO, Tech Talent Charter**

Debbie Forster is an award-winning leader and recognised figure in the areas of diversity, tech, innovation and education.

She is co-founder and CEO for the Tech Talent Charter, a non-profit industry collective that aims to deliver greater inclusion and diversity in the UK tech sector. Debbie also serves as a Trustee for the British Council and on the government’s Digital Economy Council, the Institute of Coding’s Diversity Board and the steering group of #TechSheCan.

Debbie was awarded an MBE in January 2017 for “*Services to Digital Technology and Tech Development”* and was named as the *Most Influential Woman in UK IT* by Computer Weekly in 2019.



**Caitlin Gould**

**Co-Founder, Kensa Health; Co-Founder, TECgirls; SETsquared Cornwall EiR; Chair of the Digital Skills Partnership Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**

Caitlin is joining us to talk about the importance of early intervention and overcoming internal and system bias when addressing the challenges of women in tech. Caitlin has worked in tech for over 15 years and was a Director at the Cornish embedded software company Bluefruit for 4 years, helping the company to grow in revenue and in the number of women they employed. She has recently set up her own Digital Health company called Kensa Health and is also Co-Founder of TECgirls, which aims to ignite a passion for technology, engineering, and digital creativity among girls in Cornwall. She is also the Chair of the Digital Skills Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Caitlin says:

*“I am devoted to the continued development of digital skills across Cornwall. We need to ensure we are skilling our youth for the jobs of tomorrow. The more diverse the sector is, the better.”*



**Allanah Armondi**

**Director of People and Culture, Thought Quarter**

**Allanah is joining us to talk about the importance of flexibility and promoting diverse routes into tech roles; it’s not just about hard coder skills, the right mindset and values are also important.**

Allanah is Co-Founder and Director of the Cornish consultancy-led software development agency Thought Quarter. Her focus is on creating a great workplace that delivers great work for their clients and offers life-changing opportunities for existing and new employees. Allanah says:

*“We’re all about delivering progress with purpose. Being a woman in tech doesn’t mean you have to be a coder, there’s other routes and avenues. We want our people to progress their career in the way that suits them best.”*



**Jenna Saberton**

**Curriculum Development Manager in Aero, Engineering and Marine for TCCG; Self Employed Lean Manufacturing Engineer**

Jenna is a qualified Manufacturing Engineer and has worked in the industry for over 10 years.  She currently works with SME’s in Cornwall developing the skills required by industry into the curriculum, giving our future generation of Engineers the most relevant skills, they will require to enter into industry.  Prior to this role Jenna was working as a self-employed Lean Engineer and is also a qualified teacher in FE & HE. Jenna will be talking about her experience as a Woman in Engineering.  Jenna says:

*“I am very passionate about reaching out to the younger generation, showing them how amazing it is to work in this sector and by being more present in schools, I believe I can encourage and inspire the next generation of Engineers”.*

**What we learnt**

**~What works?**

* A SME can make a big change faster than a large company. This puts Cornwall at an advantage.
* We also have a great collaborative sector in Cornwall which makes change easier
* When you focus on women it will impact people with a disability, men, LGTB, and minority groups “Gender is a gateway drug”
* Making positions remote, flexible and part time BY DEFUALT has increased applications from women significantly
* Pledge to future employees that they can grow in the company so when they leave they have grown
* Alternative routes into the industry are; bootcamps, apprenticeships, upskilling, help with educational providers and companies clubbing together to grow that talent
* The impact of the impact and the cost of living means that we need to get smart; we can change the game and the rules
* Put ideas into actions; start **NOW** with baby steps
* Language is key. There are tools you can use to remove bias from your written copy (online, job descriptions etc)
* Tec Girls is growing, do [join](https://www.tecgirls.co.uk/about)!

**What are the challenges?**

**Stats**

* 19% of women are in the Tech Industry (UK)
* 22% of women are Directors (UK)
* 13% of GCSE students are girls (Cornwall)
* 13% of University, female, students undertake a computing or related subject in Cornwall
* Inclusion rights first, diversity will follow
* Data on women and leadership is patchy as retention is great. This poses the question how can we grow them, how can we keep them?
* Policies, for example maternity leave, still need updating and are lacking behind compared to other European countries
* Focus on autonomy, even more so after COVID as we learnt to work differently. However, will this still be encouraged by employers?
* Job Specs needs changing to accommodate skills, i.e. we need to find the right mindset and values
* Cornwall is behind the rest of the UK and needs a lot of work!
* It is about technical skills, not so much about higher level skills; where to go to get the knowledge?
* Need of jargon training, communication skills, diversity training, leadership coaching, technical training courses, transferable skills. All of these should be flexible and affordable training.
* Imposter syndrome; innate or learnt?
* A lot of behaviour goes unchallenged. How can we make sure people are called out and correctly disciplined?
* Is our concept of “good” leadership correct? We need to challenge what it looks like, and challenge hierarchical (patriarchal?) leadership structures.

**Ideas**

* **Support with inclusive recruitment. A network of people willing to give time to help shortlist, for example?**
* **A phone line/network of peer supporters who can be there for confidence wobbles**
* **Both these should be paid, ideally.**

**Pictures**

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