



## **MBE for Devon and Cornwall Apprenticeship and Skills Champion**

Sharron Robbie, Managing Director of the Devon and Cornwall Training Providers Network (DCTPN), has been awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours list 2021.

The DCTPN, which represents more than 50 Training Providers across the South West, congratulates Sharron on receiving recognition for her work in the Apprenticeships and Skills sector, with the award of an MBE for services to Apprenticeships and Skills.

Previously an Apprentice, Sharron has spent the last 12 years working in the post 16 education, training and skills sector, where she has focused her efforts on developing the links between businesses and training providers to benefit young people and adults. Passionate about opportunities being made available for all, and for the ability for education and training to support social mobility, Sharron is a strong advocate of Apprenticeships and life-long learning and development.

Her work with employers and apprentices started during her previous role at City College Plymouth, where she was the Director of Marketing, Corporate Relations & Enterprise for 8 years. Moving into her present role 4 years ago, Sharron has worked tirelessly to promote Apprenticeship opportunities and to bring together key stakeholder groups to facilitate greater and more positive partnership working.

Sharron commented: "I am absolutely thrilled to have been recognised in the New Year's Honours list - I still cannot quite believe it. However, I could not do the work I do without the support of a huge amount of people - their encouragement and endorsement are critical to the successes the Network has achieved - collaboration, partnership and teamwork are key elements of our work. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supports the DCTPN and the work we do in the post-16 education, skills & training sector."

In a period that has been extremely turbulent for education and employment, Sharron has supported the region's employers, Apprentices and local authorities in a number of different roles. As the pandemic loomed it was essential for there to be support for all parties involved in education and training. The pace of change and the need for clear, up-to-date information gathering and sharing was paramount in order to keep training providers and employers in a position to support their Apprentices. Sharron set aside her normal working practices and it was a case of getting done what was needed regardless of the time of day or in fact what day it was. The impact of her work during this time has been significant with countless providers feeding back how much of a difference the support she has given to them has made to them.

Sharron said: "The current pandemic has seen huge impact on young people, in terms of their future career pathways, specifically into Apprenticeships and employment. We have seen a significant drop in Apprenticeship vacancies across the South West and this has reduced the opportunities for young people who left school in the summer. Furthermore, how teaching and learning are delivered has undergone a massive transformation and at pace - the DCTPN has had to provide additional support to training providers during this period of transition into the new way of working.



“I am really proud of the work that has been done by the Training Providers during this challenging year – they have really stepped up and gone the extra mile to keep learners and staff safe, to keep learners, including apprentices on programme, moving to online teaching wherever possible and supporting employers – it’s been a mammoth effort and our providers should be applauded.”

“My current focus is in supporting older workers, facing redundancy, and on the wrap-around-support required for those undertaking a Kickstart placement. I am working with key partners such as Devon County Council, Plymouth & Exeter City Councils as well as local organisations such as the Devon & Plymouth Chamber, the Real Ideas Organisation and the Local Enterprise Partnerships in both counties. It is vital that we work together to maximise funding streams and positive outcomes for these groups.”

Sharron’s drive and enthusiasm and commitment to getting things done has seen her position the DCTPN so that is today recognised as one of the most prominent, independent sector groups in the country. She works not only across Devon and Cornwall but also represents the training, skills and Apprenticeships sector regionally and nationally. An Apprentice Champion she was instrumental in working with the Torbay Development Agency on the Opportunities through Apprenticeships project across Torbay, which resulted in greater take up on Apprenticeships by SME business and the introduction of a Torbay Young Apprentice Ambassador Network – 12 young apprentices from local businesses who endorse apprenticeships and visit schools and careers fairs to talk about their apprenticeship journey, to help promote and raise awareness.

Sharron said: “I am extremely proud of the work we have done over the past 12 months to raise the profile of Apprenticeships – it has had such a positive impact on young people in the region, and the work we have done to change perceptions amongst teachers and parents and carers is something I am particularly proud of – I personally visited 35 schools and spoke to more than 500 teachers and governors about the very real opportunities an apprenticeship can offer. When you see the benefits of good advice and guidance around Apprenticeships leading to a lifetime of employment and skills development, you can only be happy”.

Her tireless work has led onto to other roles as the DCTPN has become the “go to” organisation for information, advice and expertise on the post 16 skills, education and training sector. Since the pandemic she has been working voluntarily with the Heart of the Southwest LEP, Devon County Council as Chair of their Covid Recovery Skills Task & Finish sub group, Plymouth City Council, and the Exeter City Skills Group to name just a few. She is recognised by these groups as having real expertise in her field and for being able to bring together disparate groups in order to get things done.

Further afield Sharron is the Regional Chair for the Association of Employment & Learning Providers Southern Hub and in addition has been a member of several high-profile judging panels on national competitions to recognise excellence in Apprenticeships. Sharron said of her multiple roles “Sometimes you aren’t sure which hat you are wearing but being at the heart of the region’s approach to skills and development is critical in what the network believes in. I also owe all the groups I work with a big thank you, without a seat at the table and the opportunity to share ideas and drive initiatives forward we would not have had the success we enjoy”.

Exeter Colleges Director of Apprenticeships, Mike Blakeley, Chair of the Devon and Cornwall Training Providers Network, comments on Sharron’s honour: “Sharron has worked



day and night over the last 4 years to raise the profile of Apprenticeships and connect all the right stakeholders to work together for common good. The recognition of an MBE is a fitting tribute to the countless hours she has put in to go over and above to support our members, employers and young people. I know she will want to continue her outstanding work and create more opportunities and connections for the benefit of others”.