

# Torbay Place Leadership Board and Health Innovation – Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026

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## Background

This paper summarises the discussion between Torbay partners (*Torbay Council, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, South Devon College, Department for Work and Pensions*) and Health Innovation Southwest.

Partners met to explore how Torbay can move faster on prevention and improved outcomes by better aligning across organisations delivering in and for Torbay on health innovation, education and skills and employability. The discussion recognised that Torbay's challenges (demographics, health inequalities, skills gaps and economic inactivity) are acute and require coordinated action across anchor institutions.

## Meeting summary

Discussion focused on the shared challenges facing the area, including high levels of economic inactivity, persistent health inequalities, and a growing cohort of young people at risk of becoming, or remaining, not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Department for Work and Pensions highlighted the scale of need, with significant numbers of residents on Universal Credit (**19,623**) and a high prevalence of health-related barriers to work, particularly linked to mental health and long-term conditions.

There was strong consensus that efforts should centre on developing more coherent “employability pathways” that span prevention, early intervention and support back into work. This includes earlier engagement with young people, potentially from primary school age alongside targeted support for those already disengaged, such as elective home-educated learners or individuals facing complex health and social barriers. Partners emphasised that effective

interventions must combine relational, person-centred support with digital innovation, rather than relying on either in isolation.

Innovation was viewed as a key enabler across the system, not limited to new technologies but including service redesign, workforce development and community-led solutions. Examples highlighted the value of integrating health, skills and employment support to create seamless pathways, alongside opportunities to pilot new approaches such as innovation accelerators or entrepreneurial programmes. There was also recognition of the importance of aligning these approaches with local assets and place strengths, including anchor institutions such as the NHS, the college and the council, which can play a leading role in creating employment opportunities and supporting inclusive growth.

However, several barriers were identified, particularly the fragmentation of existing provision, limited ability to track individuals across programmes, and the risk of duplication. Partners emphasised the need for greater system coherence, clearer data sharing and more coordinated targeting of resources, potentially focused on areas of highest deprivation within Torbay.

In response, it was agreed that a summary of options and potential areas of focus would be developed with the aim of building consensus around a small number of priorities that can deliver measurable impact over the next 12–18 months.

## Recommendations

The Place Leadership Board is asked to endorse a focused, place-based programme of work that brings together existing activity into a single, coherent approach centred on improving employability, health outcomes and economic participation.

This would involve adopting an integrated “employability pathway” spanning prevention support for disengaged young people, pathways for economically inactive residents, particularly those with health-related barriers and onward progression and retention in work. This approach reflects the strong consensus that improving life outcomes in Torbay requires a whole-system response linking health, skills and employment, with innovation acting as an enabling function rather than a discrete programme.

### **To support this, the Board is asked to consider several options:**

- The development of an 8–10-week baseline exercise to establish a clear understanding of priority cohorts, map existing provision, and identify where pathways currently break down.

This should include a focus on key groups such as NEET young people, young people at risk of NEET, electively home educated learners, and residents experiencing health-related worklessness. Alongside this, partners should begin to discuss a viable approach to shared data and cohort tracking, addressing a key barrier identified during discussions and supporting more effective coordination across programmes and organisations. This exercise will reduce the risk of duplication and fragmentation of existing activity.

- Pilot a 12 month place-based demonstrator to test this approach in practice, with Paignton proposed as the initial focus given its alignment with Pride in Place governance and its concentration of deprivation. This demonstrator should bring together existing initiatives, combining intensive, person-centred support with scalable innovation, and should be designed to generate clear evidence of impact and learning that can be applied across Torbay. Embedding evaluation and learning from the beginning will also ensure any case for future scaling or replicating is taken seriously. The intention is not to create new standalone provision, but to coordinate and strengthen what already exists in a more targeted and integrated way.
- Support the development of a joint “call for innovators” focused on work, health and skills. This would invite contributions from established providers, community organisations and local entrepreneurs, including young people, to address key pressure points in the system such as engagement of hard-to-reach cohorts, return-to-work pathways, and the effective blending of digital and relational support. This approach would also help to attract external investment and position Torbay as a testbed for place-based innovation, aligned with the wider “Tech by the Bay” ambition.
- The role of anchor institutions is central to the success of this work. The Board is therefore asked to support a coordinated approach across the Council, NHS, College and DWP to align entry-level job opportunities, apprenticeships and training pathways with the proposed employability model, as well as to strengthen inclusive employment practices. This includes progressing towards Disability Confident Leader status collectively and embedding principles of “place, train, maintain” to ensure residents are supported not only into work, but to sustain and progress within employment over time.

Finally, it is recommended that a small, time-limited task and finish group is established to oversee delivery, develop a detailed implementation plan and ensure alignment with existing programmes such as Connect to Work, WorkWell and local skills planning. This group should return to the

Place Leadership Board with a refined delivery plan, including proposed measures, resource requirements and governance arrangements. Throughout, the group should prioritise system coherence, reducing duplication, clarifying roles and hand-offs, and focusing collective effort on a small number of shared outcomes ensuring that activity is coordinated, evidence-led and capable of delivering measurable impact over the next 12–18 months.

## Supporting Evidence

Section 3 (Supporting Evidence) below shows that youth disengagement levels have remained relatively stable but persistently elevated, with NEET rates hovering around 4% from early 2025 to early 2026 and only marginal improvement in “Not Known” cases (falling to ~1.1–1.2%). This suggests the system is maintaining performance rather than achieving significant improvement, with a consistent cohort of young people still not engaged in education, employment or training. Alongside this, the inclusion of elective home education trends points to a growing or sustained group potentially outside mainstream pathways, reinforcing the risk of future disengagement. Overall, the data indicates a steady but stubborn challenge, where existing interventions are not yet shifting outcomes at scale, underlining the need for a more integrated, targeted approach as proposed in the paper.

### 1. Torbay Youth Unemployment Data – March 2025 to March 2026

		March 2025	June 2025	September 2025	December 2025	March 2026 (p)
16-19	Searching for work	180	147	159	193	219
	Working - with requirements	17	32	26	26	20
	No work requirements	142	143	124	120	118
	Working - no requirements	14	19	18	20	13
	Planning for work	8	12	9	9	5
	Preparing for work	16	10	11	17	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>393</b>
Total	Searching for work	307	279	290	327	392
	Working - with requirements	111	146	128	113	111
	No work requirements	651	669	693	705	693
	Working - no requirements	90	101	127	100	99
	Planning for work	36	34	27	36	40
	Preparing for work	103	103	85	85	93
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1303</b>	<b>1333</b>	<b>1347</b>	<b>1361</b>	<b>1436</b>
Total	Searching for work	485	428	447	527	614
	Working - with requirements	127	177	150	131	137
	No work requirements	790	814	815	818	814
	Working - no requirements	102	126	147	120	113
	Planning for work	44	43	38	44	48
	Preparing for work	120	110	96	103	106
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>1693</b>	<b>1689</b>	<b>1744</b>	<b>1830</b>

## 2. Year 12 – 13 NEET and Not Known % Percentages 2025 and 2026

Month	NEET %	Not Known %
January 2025	3.6%	1.9%
February 2025	4.0%	1.6%
March 2025	3.9%	2.4%
Month	NEET %	Not Known %
January 2026	4%	1.2%
February 2026	4.1%	1.1%
March 2026	4.0%	1.2%

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Stat explore data March 2025 to March 2026

<sup>2</sup> Post 16 Learning Participation Team Reports – Torbay Council

### 3. Elective home education at census date numbers and percentages 2022 to 2026

	Number of EHE children on census date	Percentage of EHE children on census date	Rate of EHE children on census day by population
2022/23 Autumn term	310	100%	1.8%
2022/23 Spring term	330	100%	1.9%
2022/23 Summer term	370	100%	2.1%
2023/24 Autumn term	400	100%	2.3%
2023/24 Spring term	430	100%	2.4%
2023/24 Summer term	520	100%	2.9%
2024/25 Autumn term	460	100%	2.6%
2024/25 Spring term	520	100%	2.9%
2024/25 Summer term	580	100%	3.2%
2025/26 Autumn term	500	100%	2.8%

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