Energy Transition Zone Ltd

Jobs & Skills Barriers Study

2025

1. Summary

This Jobs & Skills Barriers Study was conducted to understand the barriers facing residents of SIMD 10 and 20 postcodes, particularly the Torry area, in accessing training and employment opportunities linked to the Energy Transition Zone. Across various conversations with local community groups, training providers, employment support organisations, employers, and public agencies, several recurring barriers were identified:

- **Practical challenges** such as childcare, transport and poverty significantly limit participation

- **Confidence, motivation and mental health** present the most prevalent barrier, appearing across a variety of age groups from young people to older residents

- **Recruitment practices are generally felt to be exclusionary** and too formal

- **Energy-related career pathways are poorly understood**, particularly 'green' jobs

Recommendations emphasise the importance of creating clear and accessible routes into training and career opportunities, embedding employability support within trusted community environments, addressing systemic challenges through targeted initiatives, and demystifying energy careers and qualification pathways.

2. Purpose

ETZ Ltd has previously offered funded energy-related training places and educational activities, yet uptake from SIMD 10 and 20 postcodes within Aberdeen City, particularly Torry, has been low, indicating that cost-of-living and financial barriers are not the sole factors inhibiting engagement with skills and training opportunities. This Jobs & Skills Barriers Study aimed to identify the real-world challenges faced by residents in the vicinity of the Energy Transition Zone, to recommend practical steps to minimise these barriers and open accessible pathways into sustainable long-term employment that meaningfully addresses the needs and interests of the local community.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted between May and August 2025, and predominantly covered the Torry area of Aberdeen City as the residential area in closest proximity to the Energy Transition Zone. Following a period of stakeholder mapping, ETZ Ltd identified several local stakeholder organisations with experience in working alongside Torry residents.

Identified stakeholders were organised into five groups, based upon their scope and the nature of their activities in Torry:

1. **Community groups**, such as voluntary organisations and support groups

2. **Employers**, particularly energy-related employers operating in the nearby Altens area

3. **Employment support organisations**, such as local employability service providers

4. **Education and training providers**, such as local colleges

5. **And 'other' organisations**, such as services delivered by the local authority.

Following this, each identified stakeholder was contacted via email and provided with a description of the study, tailored to their activities within the Torry area. Community groups, for example, were provided with the following outreach statement:

*"I am undertaking a Jobs & Skills Barriers study on behalf of ETZ Ltd to better understand the obstacles faced by Torry residents, specifically when trying to access training or employment opportunities. As the launch of the Energy Transition Skills Hub approaches, we are looking to understand **which challenges pose the biggest barriers to accessing opportunities**. This study will be used to inform our current and future jobs and training initiatives, to ensure that local needs are represented and addressed in a meaningful way.*

*As a trusted voice in the community, your perspective is important to us and this study. We would really appreciate your insight into the barriers that you notice most often, and any ideas you have for **solutions that will meaningfully reflect the needs and interests** of the people that you support."*

Eighteen responses were received (*see Figure 1*), following which the study undertook a series of semi-structured discussions with each stakeholder. These discussions focused on the collection and thematic analysis of qualitative data, identifying barriers, opportunities and examples of existing or potential best practices. Each stakeholder was asked a series of open questions related to their anecdotal experiences and insights into employability challenges within Torry.
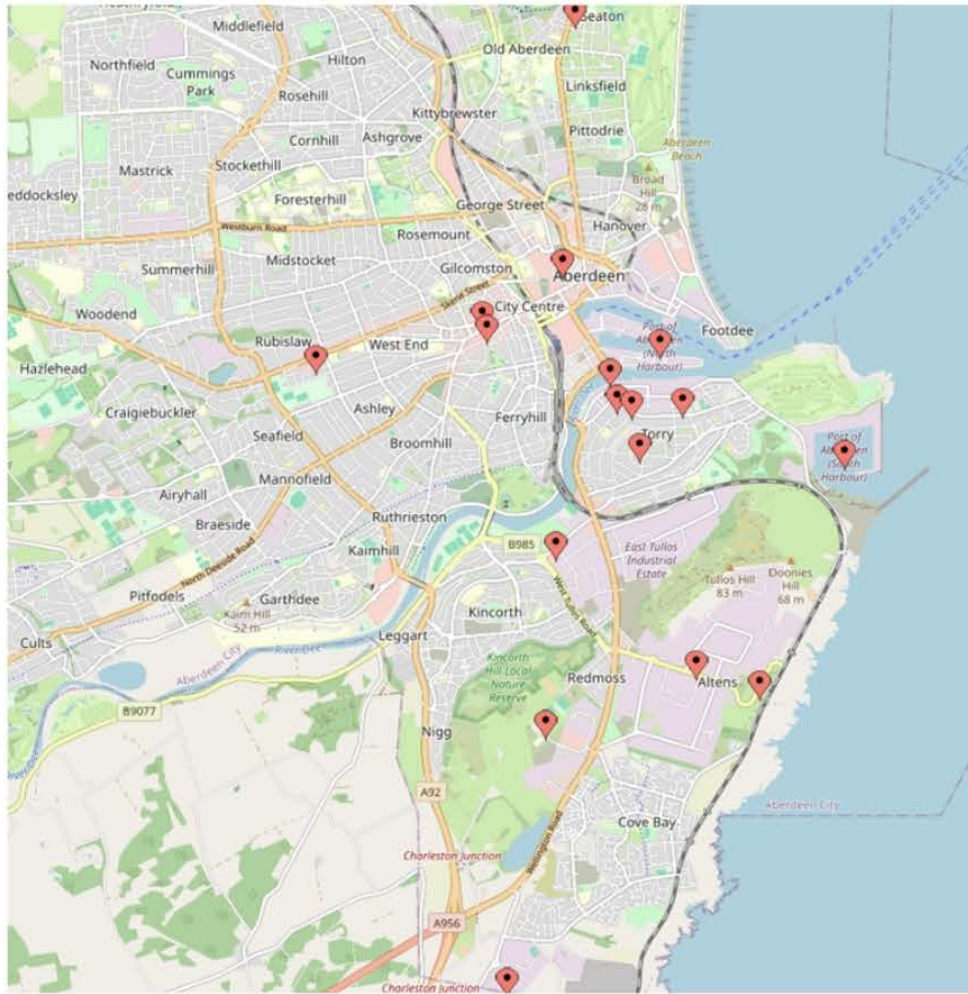
Figure 1: A map of respondent stakeholder offices and/or areas of activity.

4. Findings

4.1 General group feedback

Each stakeholder shared valuable insights into the barriers people face in accessing training and employment opportunities, alongside the types of support needed to overcome them.

Community groups, such as community organisations, voluntary projects and locally embedded charities, frequently act as a first point of contact for residents seeking support. Their insights were largely centred around individual and social barriers such as confidence, mental health, and digital and/or social exclusion, with a strong emphasis on the value of trust, peer influence, and local delivery of support services. These organisations also identified a lack of consistent employability support for young people, particularly 14/15-year-olds who are disengaged from school and therefore unable to access suitable support. More support is needed to assist young people in knowing where to look for information and opportunities, how to build a CV, understanding application and interview processes, and communicating their skills and personal qualities effectively.

Employers, which ranged from small specialist businesses to larger organisations, highlighted practical and structural barriers to local recruitment and retention, such as skill mismatches. They placed importance on the value of soft skills and indicated an awareness of the necessity of employer flexibility.

Employment support organisations, consisting of local charities and agencies supporting those seeking employment and often facing vulnerabilities, most frequently identify similar individual and social barriers as community groups, alongside structural issues such as recruitment processes and the results-driven nature of formal support services, stressing the need for sustained person-centred alternatives. There are a number of organisations operating within and around Torry with demonstrable positive outcomes. It was identified, however, that disjointed communication between organisations leads to the duplication of services. Coordination between initiatives could deliver a broader range of targeted services.

Education and training providers, such as local colleges and apprenticeship-based organisations, identified a number of practical and structural challenges, such as transport and the 'time poor versus cash poor' dilemma. They emphasised the value of developing close links with industry and employers to align qualification pathways with career opportunities.

Other stakeholders, such as local authorities and public sector services, described a wide array of overlapping barriers. They highlighted the need for flexible and localised pathways to tackle issues such as confidence and the importance of strong employer engagement in schools and communities.

4.2 Individual and social barriers

Individual and social barriers refer to the personal circumstances, characteristics, or wider societal factors that may limit a person's ability to engage with training and employment opportunities. Individual barriers arise from a person's personal situation, for example, their skills or confidence, whereas social barriers stem from a person's broader environment, such as cultural attitudes or community influences.

Overall, a particularly prominent barrier identified by stakeholders is poor confidence and mental health. Young people in Torry often lack self-belief, may be unsure of their interests or aspirations, or are disengaged from school. Adults are facing low self-esteem, particularly those affected by poverty or long-term unemployment. Misconceptions about certain career pathways, such as the longevity or expectations of apprenticeship schemes, may also contribute to low confidence or disengagement.

Skills awareness can also be seen to contribute to low confidence. Many residents do not recognise their own strengths or transferable skills, leading to struggles in effectively communicating hobbies, volunteering or informal work experience positively and effectively in job applications or interviews.

Furthermore, social isolation and a lack of access to networks are seen as an important, but invisible barrier, particularly for older residents and those with disabilities. On the other hand, for residents capable of accessing local networks, social opportunities are increasingly prioritised over training opportunities. Struggles with prioritisation appear to stem from many individuals being 'time poor', 'cash poor', or both, as the need to earn a wage alongside earning a qualification reduces available time for learning and socialising.

Finally, the close-knit community culture within Torry is reported to have the unintended effect of limiting the uptake of opportunities as a result of community pressures and expectations. Individuals seem discouraged from pursuing different or unfamiliar opportunities for fear of 'othering' themselves, choosing to follow familiar career paths (such as those followed by their parents or other family members), rather than exploring alternative opportunities. This creates pressure within the community to 'conform' to typical pathways instead of exploring other avenues.

4.3 Practical and structural barriers

Practical and structural barriers refer to more tangible and systemic conditions that limit engagement. Practical barriers manifest in the immediate, everyday living challenges that pose difficulties for individuals, such as issues of cost, time, or accessibility, and often serve to cause and/or reinforce individual barriers, such as confidence. A prominent overlap can be seen between practical and individual barriers. Structural barriers, on the other hand, refer to organisational, institutional or policy-related limitations resulting in unequal access to opportunities and engagement with labour markets.

Childcare was raised as a particularly acute practical barrier for parents, especially those whose children have additional support needs, as even when funding for childcare is available, places are limited. This creates uncertainty and difficulty for parents to commit to training or long-term employment if employers are not able to accommodate a certain degree of flexibility in working hours.

Transport presents another particularly prominent practical challenge. Despite Torry's geographic proximity to key employment hubs, such as Altens, indirect and expensive public transportation options effectively preclude many residents from nearby opportunities. Shift patterns may compound this issue, with early starts and late finishes conflicting with public transportation timetables.

A third practical barrier, overlapping with individual barriers, is digital exclusion. Though improving, residents lack confidence or skills in navigating digital systems, limiting their access to various training and job application opportunities. There are various community-based efforts to address digital skills gaps, with drop-in sessions offering effective support with positive outcomes for attendees' confidence and skills. Support is also available via referral; however, falling attendance – thought to be a result of a lack of awareness of the availability or location of support – has resulted in a limited number or relocation of sessions, leaving gaps in provision. Digital exclusion presents less of a challenge within education settings, as a result of initiatives such as laptop-borrowing schemes improving accessibility for students without the means to access technology off-campus.

As both practical and structural barriers, poverty and housing challenges are also reported as particularly destabilising. Individuals experiencing food insecurity, benefits sanctions or unsuitable housing conditions find it difficult to focus on secondary priorities such as training. Transitioning from benefits to paid employment also places many people in a precarious financial position if work start dates prevent a payment overlap, as initial reductions in income can cause short-term financial hardship before individuals can regain financial security.

Structurally, recruitment processes present a unique barrier due to potentially exclusionary practices. Complex applications, digital-only systems, and requirements for passports or driving licences as identification documents – often unaffordable or inaccessible for individuals experiencing financial or housing insecurity – create barriers at the first step. Furthermore, formal and linear application or interview procedures are intimidating for many individuals re-entering employment, and limited feedback or application responses limit the ability to improve performance or communication to secure future opportunities.

Another structural barrier manifests through a lack of funding for wellbeing services, particularly for those in training and education. Cuts to funding have reduced the availability of pastoral support. Alternatives to classroom-based learning are available, such as apprenticeships; however, these are unattractive to adult learners due to low wages. Instead, adult learners prefer short courses, yet these are typically privately funded, putting them out of reach for many. In addition to this, a lack of awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring locally or offering apprenticeship positions means potential opportunity creation is being missed. Employers who are aware of the social and organisational benefits of hiring locally report that they would prefer to do so, and could do so if funding for local training were more readily available.

Finally, for individuals who gained their existing qualifications overseas, unique barriers arise from the recognition (or lack thereof) of said qualifications, and subsequent visa, housing, and re-training pressures, further limiting access to suitable training and employment for migrant and minority groups in the area.

4.4 Energy-related barriers

Energy-related barriers, for the purpose of this study, refer to challenges and obstacles that limit a person's ability to engage with training and employment opportunities within energy-related fields. These barriers encompass individual, social, practical and structural factors.

While energy-related opportunities are recognised as an important area of growth, they are not perceived as accessible to many residents of Torry. STEM and adjacent careers are often perceived as intimidating and inaccessible due to widespread self-esteem issues, especially for young people, creating the perception that energy career pathways are out of reach. This feeling of inaccessibility is compounded by a general unawareness of what green energy jobs involve, potential access pathways, which qualifications are required, and the transferability of oil and gas experience. Pathways are generally described as unclear, creating an uncertainty about where and how to begin, despite many residents in Torry or elsewhere holding skills that are transferable to new energy roles, particularly in decommissioning.

Trust also plays a significant role in barriers to energy-related careers. There is a degree of scepticism regarding whether the opportunities created by the Energy Transition Zone will provide meaningful benefits primarily to those living in the closest vicinity, or whether these benefits will instead be taken up by those living outside of the community. Stakeholders believe that this lack of confidence in the inclusivity of emerging and transitioning industries is the result of the slow manifestation of Net Zero-related job opportunities in comparison to the availability of related training, leaving many feeling discouraged by having to wait for tangible pathways into long-term careers.

4.5 Current best practices

In addition to challenges and barriers, the discussions with stakeholders also highlighted potentially transferable examples of best practice within Torry, regarding the most impactful and best-received approaches.

Community-led engagement, whereby programmes are run by trusted and reputable local organisations or groups, achieves higher uptake and positive outcomes. In particular, these approaches focus on offering person-centred support, with long-term, one-to-one and individualised support providing more effective solutions to overcoming barriers than short-term, results-driven approaches. Individuals engage more readily when support is delivered by people they trust, when activities are locally based, and when outcomes are clear and immediate.

Community-centred support presents an additional benefit to peer influence, with stakeholders reporting that sociable employability support encourages success stories to be shared with others, building stronger motivation: when an individual shares that they have found employment or learnt a new skill, their peers feel more encouraged to try to do so themselves. The potential for practical and hands-on experiences such as volunteering and work placements is seen as a particularly valuable solution in this regard, with opportunities combining employability support with interest-based activities providing more accessible environments to build confidence, skills and routine.

Employers emphasised the importance of soft skills such as teamwork, communication and reliability, noting that these skills are just as valuable as technical qualifications, highlighting a potential focus area to build on employability. Some also highlighted their experience with the benefits of showing flexibility around childcare or caring responsibilities, reporting stronger staff satisfaction in such cases and indicating that certain practical barriers are already being proactively addressed for those successfully re-entering the workforce.

Further positive examples relate to apprenticeships and training pathways. Achievement and retention rates are generally strong, though it was noted that some learners and apprentices move on quickly after completion to secure higher salaries elsewhere. Less rigidly defined job roles and qualification pathways also reportedly provide greater opportunities for career diversification, allowing individuals to build on their transferable skills rather than being limited to specific job titles. However, this could also provide a potential explanation for the widespread lack of understanding of green career pathways, as the multiplicity of possible routes into jobs may be confusing or overwhelming without guidance.

Finally, volunteering opportunities present a valuable opportunity for overcoming confidence challenges. There is a strong ethos and commitment within Torry to supporting the local community, with several locally led volunteering initiatives, and an increasing number of individuals are volunteering with employability in mind, especially to maintain a pre-employment routine and build confidence and soft skills. Volunteering groups reported that the biggest barrier to participating in volunteering schemes is the current cost of living crisis, as many people do not enough time or income to justify 'working for free', so such projects may require more funding or clearer timelines for participants to deliver sustained long-term impact. More effective communication avenues between employability and voluntary organisations would also increase the potential for volunteering roles to provide clear pathways into careers.

5. Conclusion

Overall, there is a complex interplay between individual, social, practical and structural barriers currently shaping access to training and employment in Torry. While identified challenges vary between stakeholders, the discussions consistently centred around confidence, well-being and trust as preconditions for engagement. Many individuals face low self-esteem and an unawareness of the transferability of their existing skills, and close-knit community dynamics can potentially serve to reinforce limited aspirations. These problems are exacerbated by practical and structural pressures such as childcare, transport, financial insecurity and the rigidity of standard application procedures.

Examples of effective practice demonstrate that tailored, community-led approaches and sustained one-to-one support tend to generate the most meaningful outcomes in mitigating barriers, rather than high-level solutions imposed without local input. Addressing barriers effectively will therefore involve aligning local opportunities with the real needs and interests of residents of Torry. This will require an integrated approach, combining person-centred support driven by individual outcomes over statistical results, with structural adjustments to recruitment, funding and the provision of training.

6. Recommendations

The systemic nature of many of the barriers identified throughout this study requires a tiered approach to making actionable recommendations, depending upon both the scale and scope of activities.

6.1 For ETZ Ltd

Clarify pathways into energy careers	Develop clear and accessible information on qualifications, entry routes, and the transferability of oil and gas skills into 'green' jobs. Highlight the transferability of oil and gas skills into decommissioning opportunities. Provide accessible definitions of 'green' jobs and industries, particularly for young people, to broaden local awareness of the activities and responsibilities involved.
Strengthen local trust through dedicated local benefits	Ensure that opportunities linked to the Energy Transition Zone are demonstrably accessible and beneficial to residents of Torry, through targeted outreach and recruitment.
Facilitate community-led skills and employability efforts	Partner with trusted, local organisations to support the localised delivery of pre-employment programmes, emphasising confidence and skills-building activities alongside practical experience opportunities.

6.2 For local industry and employers

Embed flexibility within recruitment and employment practices	Offer adaptable and individualised working arrangements, particularly around childcare and caring responsibilities, to improve perceptions of inclusivity and accessibility. Advertise employment opportunities directly to residents through partnerships with local, trusted employment support providers.
Enhance employer presence within local schools and communities	Strengthen local engagement with young people and school leavers to not only build awareness of current and future opportunities, but also address misconceptions about apprenticeships and job roles.
Support local training partnerships	Work alongside schools, colleges and local training providers to co-design courses reflecting real local aspirations and labour market needs.

6.3 For the local authority

Address practical barriers to training and employment through targeted support	Expand the provision of affordable childcare services, improve transport links to employment hubs such as Altens, and reassess funding for wellbeing services in education hubs and communities.
Invest in outcome-driven employability support	Rather than focusing on results-driven initiatives, humanise city-wide employability support by partnering with local organisations delivering sustained, trauma-informed, person-centred services that prioritise wellbeing and confidence-building.
Tackle systemic exclusion	Review the social implications of recruitment conventions and ID requirements to reduce barriers for those experiencing poverty or housing instability. Develop targeted local schemes to provide affordable and accessible 'top-up' or short courses for individuals with existing qualifications, particularly overseas qualifications without UK accreditation.

7. With thanks to