INNOVATE

Innovation Hub Newsletter EDITION 18: NOV 2026

Welcome to the November 2026 edition of the Innovation Hub newsletter.

It's definitely feeling autumnal. The clocks have gone back and, whilst we have had a few sunny days in west and east Dorset, the recent persistent morning mist and changing colours of the leaves signal colder weather ahead. It's continued to be a busy summer, and the change of prime minister has brought further changes. This includes the announcement by Andy Burnham that Integrated Care Board (ICB) footprints, along with other public bodies, would align with Strategic Authorities, the prime minister's backing of plans for a Wessex Mayor, and the decision not to abolish Healthwatch. Whether you work in public services, local authorities, academia, business growth hubs, voluntary and community partners, NHS organisations or wider organisations, improvement and innovation remain central to delivering quality approaches focused on the needs, outcomes and experience of our local populations.

In this November issue we highlight the diversity of innovative approaches including the 'Promoting Collaboration and Celebrating the Dorset Voluntary Community Sector Assembly' (page 2), Bridgit support tool for carers (page 3), Mixed Reality Embodiment Therapeutic Interventions (page 4), Skills Bootcamp (page 5), 'Developing the Impact' update from Bournemouth University (page 6) and many other innovative projects.

As I leave my role as Lead of the Dorset Innovation Hub, this will be my final newsletter. I have recently published a blog, 'Reflections on Building an Innovation Culture' (page 7), where I reflect on how together we have built strong foundations, learning and partnerships over the past six years.

I hope you enjoy reading the latest updates from our partners' innovative work supporting patients and service users. I wish everyone involved in Dorset Innovation Hub v2.0 every success in the future. Please continue to share your innovative projects with the team.

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"Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower."

Steve Jobs



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Promoting Collaboration: Reflections from Paula Bennetts

As my time as Programme Director of Dorset Voluntary Community Sector Assembly (VCSA) comes to a close, I've been reflecting on what I'm most proud to have seen develop. One achievement stands out above all others: collaboration.

From the outset, Dorset VCSA was never intended to do everything itself. Its purpose has always been to connect people, create opportunities for relationships to grow, and support voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and statutory partners to work differently together.

Over the past year, we have brought organisations and system partners together through co-production, service design, engagement events and shared programmes.



A particular highlight has been working alongside Macmillan colleagues to support the Anchor Programme, securing £750,000 of investment to strengthen VCSE collaboration with the Neighbourhood Health & Wellbeing Programme. I leave this work confident that the programme will continue to flourish through the commitment of its Oversight and Advisory Groups.

We have also hosted VCSE Engagement Events across Dorset, supported the Transforming Health Care Together programme, collaborated with Dorset Council and NHS partners, and helped deliver regional learning and development events. These opportunities have enabled organisations to build relationships, share expertise and shape future services together.

Importantly, we've also been honest about the challenges that can hinder partnership working, including capacity, communication, funding and data sharing. Through webinars and discussion forums, we've encouraged open conversations and explored practical approaches to overcoming these barriers.

For me, collaboration is not about creating more meetings or structures. It is about building relationships, making connections, sharing knowledge and enabling people to achieve more together than they could alone.

Strong foundations have been laid, and there is a real opportunity to build on them through new partnerships, shared solutions and continued innovation. I would like to thank Mike Murphy, incoming Dorset VCSA Chief Executive Officer, the Dorset VCSA Board, our health and care partners, and the many VCSE organisations that contribute so much to our communities. Please continue sharing your insight, expertise and ideas, and keep those valuable connections growing.

Contact: mike.murphy@dorsetvcsa.co.uk or admin@dorsetvcsa.co.uk

Bridgit Gen 2: To AI or Not to AI?



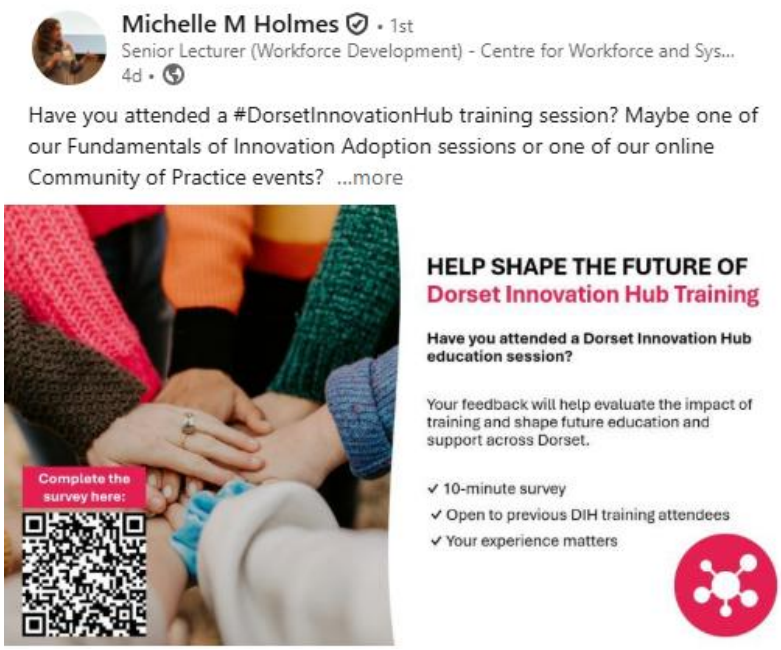
When I was asked to write about Bridgit Gen 2, Dorset Council's online support tool for carers, I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to say. I'll be honest. I had mixed feelings. Gen 2 is AI-powered and looks more obviously computer-generated than the original version. Uptake has also been lower than Gen 1, and I found myself wondering why.

Then life gave me a different perspective. During this time, I became a carer myself. What I discovered is that the real value of Bridgit isn't how it looks. It's how it supports people when they need information, guidance and reassurance when they need it most.
For me, that support has been invaluable. From illness to diagnosis, changing symptoms, applying for a Blue Badge, understanding Attendance Allowance and navigating appointments and services, Bridgit has been there throughout the journey.

I've used it in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep. I've used it while sitting next to my cared-for person in A&E. I've used it after consultant appointments, trying to understand what happens next.

What surprised me most was that Bridgit remembered where we were as a family. I didn't have to start from the beginning every time. During a period that often felt overwhelming, that continuity really mattered. And, if I'm honest, I didn't always want to talk to somebody. Sometimes you're tired, worried or simply not ready for a conversation. Having access to support on your own terms can make a real difference. AI won't be for everyone, and it won't replace people. Nor should it. But for some carers, at some moments, it can provide immediate support, guidance and reassurance when no one else is available. I know it helped me. Are you a carer, why not try Bridgit? [Bridgit - online self-help platform for carers - Dorset Council]

Education Programme



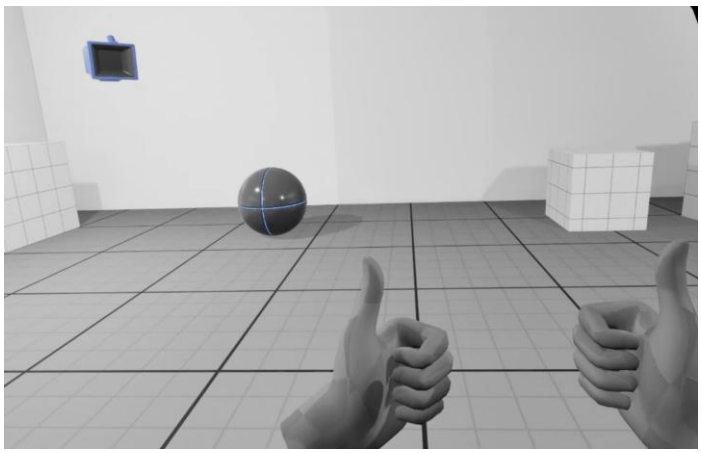


Mixed Reality embodiment as therapeutic interventions for chronic musculoskeletal (MSK) pain: Leveraging body illusions in therapeutic encounters



Researchers at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) and Health Sciences University (HSU) have recently completed an innovative 6-month proof-of-concept project exploring how Mixed Reality (MR) technologies could support future approaches to chronic musculoskeletal (MSK) pain research. The project was one of only twelve university collaborations nationally to receive funding through the highly competitive XR Network+ XR Labs Fund.

Led by Dr Asha Ward at AUB in collaboration with Professor Dave Newell at HSU, the project brought together expertise in creative technology, pain science and clinical practice.



The team investigated whether immersive visual experiences using VR could help alter how pain is experienced through developing a mixed reality prototype that allows users to see digital effects overlaid onto their own body while interacting with the real world. The technology was integrated into an experimental pain research protocol and tested with healthy participants at HSU.

Findings demonstrated that the approach is technically feasible, generally well tolerated by participants, and provides a strong foundation for future research and development.

Alongside the prototype itself, the project generated valuable knowledge about embodiment, usability, participant experience, and the practical challenges of deploying immersive technologies within healthcare research environments. Importantly, it has strengthened interdisciplinary collaboration between AUB and HSU and established a platform for future patient involvement, co-design activities, funding applications, and larger-scale studies. The team is now actively exploring additional funding opportunities and further research to investigate how these approaches could ultimately support people living with chronic musculoskeletal pain.

The collaboration highlights how Dorset's research and innovation community is leveraging creative technologies to explore new ways of addressing complex healthcare challenges. Find more information about the funding network here – XR Network+. Find more information about the project here or contact - Dr Asha Ward, Research Fellow, Arts University Bournemouth..

AUB Arts University Bournemouth | HSU Health Sciences University | Centre for Pain Research | xR Network+

Skills Bootcamp to Strengthen Prevention and Community Wellbeing Workforce



Health Sciences University (HSU), in partnership with Help & Care, has launched its first Skills Bootcamp, *Coaching for Prevention: Conversations for Change*, designed to equip frontline health, care and community professionals with the skills needed to support healthier communities and improve long-term wellbeing outcomes.

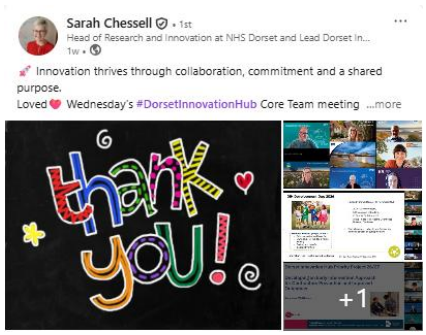
The programme was developed in response to growing workforce challenges across the health and care sector, including increasing demand on services, workforce pressures, rising health inequalities and the need for greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Delivered as part of the Government's Skills Bootcamp initiative, the programme reflects HSU's commitment to providing flexible, employer-responsive workforce development opportunities.

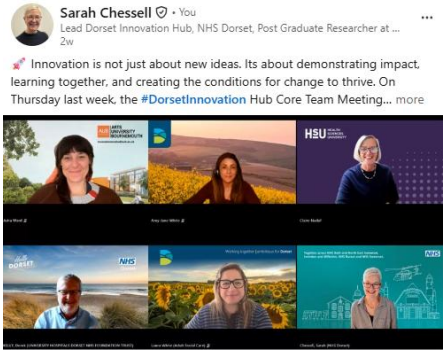
Created through a collaborative co-design process the Bootcamp has been tailored to meet the needs of professionals working directly with individuals and communities. Participants include Health and Wellbeing Coaches, Social Prescribers and Wellbeing Coordinators who play a vital role in supporting people to improve their health, wellbeing and independence.
The programme covers a range of key areas including prevention and wellbeing, population health, health inequalities, coaching and behaviour change, communication and engagement, digital skills, social prescribing and community-based support. Combining expert teaching with practical workplace application, the Bootcamp enables participants to apply learning directly within their roles.

The initiative is expected to increase workforce capability in prevention and behaviour change, strengthen understanding of population health, improve digital confidence and support integrated neighbourhood approaches to care. Ultimately, the programme aims to improve outcomes for individuals and communities while contributing to a more sustainable and prevention-focused health and care system across Dorset.

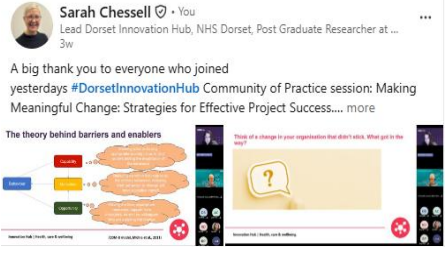
Social media snips





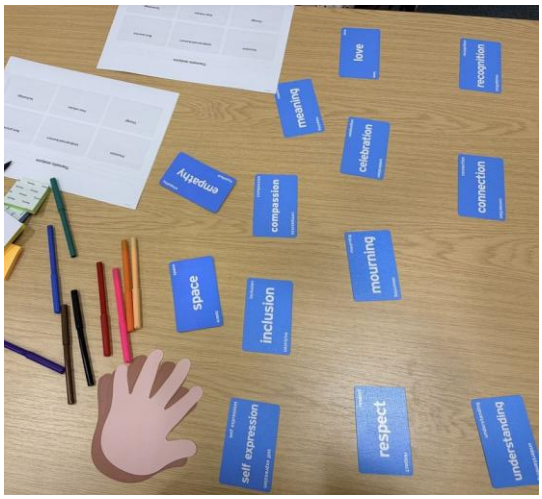






Developing the Impact Updates, Dorset Innovation Hub Partner Organisation: Bournemouth University

Beyond Mistakes



Professor John McAlaney from Bournemouth University, along with colleagues from the University of Strathclyde and Middlesex University, held a stakeholder event for their SPRITE+ funded **Beyond Mistakes** project in Glasgow on 1 October. The project explored how emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR), extended reality (XR) and AI can support people with convictions to prepare for release from prison. This includes improving education and training within prison settings, so individuals enter the job market with the knowledge and skills employers need. It also addresses barriers to accessing and navigating digital technologies that may have evolved significantly during imprisonment.

The stakeholder event took place in the Ramshorn Theatre, a converted church in Glasgow. Attendees included representatives from the criminal justice system, charities supporting people with convictions and academic researchers. An inspiring keynote was delivered by Andy Gallie of the Beacon Counselling Trust, who shared his lived experience of conviction, imprisonment and his subsequent career journey. Participants took part in activities and exercises facilitated by the Odd Arts theatre company. A recurring theme was that using technology to support education and training in prisons is not solely about employability. The confidence gained through qualifications, skills and employment opportunities helps individuals develop an identity beyond that of a person with a conviction. To find out more, contact - jmcalaney@bournemouth.ac.uk

Keeping care running when cyberattacks strike

When a care provider is hit by a cyberattack, the impact goes well beyond lost files. Care records, rotas, medication schedules and communication tools can go offline, with people relying on continuous support affected first. Recent attacks on NHS suppliers have shown how quickly a digital incident can disrupt care.

MosAIcSOC is a three-year, €6 million Horizon Europe project led by Bournemouth University (BU). It brings together 18 partners from eight countries, including hospitals, care providers, universities, cybersecurity agencies and industry.

The project is building a modular, AI-powered Security Operations Centre (SOC), a "control room" that detects cyber threats and coordinates responses. Smaller organisations can adopt only the elements they need. Explainable AI translates alerts into plain-language explanations, while a digital twin, a safe virtual copy of an organisation's systems, allows teams to rehearse attacks such as ransomware without risking live services.

In the first pilot, BU researchers are working with a healthcare and assisted-living provider to test the approach against realistic scenarios, from phishing emails to ransomware. The aim is to detect and contain incidents at least 30% faster, with reports that care managers, not just IT specialists, can understand.

For people receiving care, this means fewer service disruptions and stronger protection of personal information. For organisations, it offers a practical route to greater cyber resilience.
We would welcome hearing from Dorset health and social care organisations interested in sharing their experience or following the project. Contact - ayankouskaya@bournemouth.ac.uk

Blogs

Mixed Methods Approach to Community Engagement: Why We'll Use This Approach Again
by Jo Wilson



Listening to Communities in Ways That Work for Them: NHS Dorset recently commissioned a programme of engagement to explore how people feel about being asked a simple but important question:
"How good are you at taking care of your health?" This question helps assess a person's knowledge, skills and confidence in managing their health. While the project aimed to understand when the question should be asked and what matters most during care conversations, it also provided valuable insights into effective community engagement.

Focusing on the Outcome, Not the Method: Rather than prescribing a single engagement method, we focused on desired outcomes and partnered with four community organisations with trusted local relationships. Each organisation was given flexibility to engage in ways that suited its community, resulting in approaches including community drop-ins, focus groups, creative workshops, one-to-one conversations, online surveys, community events and shared meals. This enabled us to hear from people with diverse experiences and backgrounds.
Key lesson: focusing on what we want to learn, rather than how engagement must happen, creates space for innovation, creativity and community-led solutions.

The Power of Trusted Relationships: A key strength of this approach was engaging through trusted people, organisations and places. Working with organisations that already had established community relationships helped conversations feel more natural, inclusive and meaningful. This enabled us to reach people whose voices are often underrepresented, including those experiencing health inequalities. Meaningful engagement is not simply about asking questions. It is about creating the conditions for people to share their views openly and honestly.

Looking Ahead: The insights gathered are already informing local care design, workforce development and more flexible commissioning. As health and care systems face increasing challenges, mixed-methods engagement helps ensure innovation is shaped by lived experience rather than assumptions. By listening to communities in ways that work for them, we can make better decisions, build stronger partnerships and improve services for the people who use them.
To read the full blog - Blogs – Innovation



Reflections on Building an Innovation Culture. As the Dorset Innovation Hub enters its next phase, this reflective blog from Sarah Chessell looks back on six years of collaborative work to strengthen innovation across Dorset's health and care system. The blog explores how partners from the NHS, local government, academia, the voluntary sector, industry and patient communities have worked together to create the conditions for innovation to flourish. It highlights the importance of system leadership, partnership working and evidence-based approaches to improve outcomes for local people. Looking ahead to Dorset Innovation Hub 2.0, the blog reflects on opportunities and challenges of sustaining a culture of innovation and ensuring new ideas translate into impact. For those involved in transformation, improvement, research or innovation, it provides valuable insights into system-wide innovation and the role of collaboration in delivering lasting change. To read the full blog - Blogs – Innovation

Sea Check: Helps Swimmers Make Safer Choices as Winter Trial Begins

A pioneering collaboration is helping sea swimmers make informed decisions about water quality in Bournemouth and Boscombe, with new plans to extend monitoring through the winter months.

Sea Check is an innovative webapp designed to help people make informed decisions about sea swimming by providing near real-time information on water quality and conditions. Developed through a partnership between BCP Council, Wessex Water, Wellsat and UnifAI, the project combines environmental monitoring technology, data science and public sector collaboration to improve access to water quality information for residents and visitors. Sea Check uses AI algorithms to determine when the conditions are optimum for bacterial growth and issues an alert to advise swimmers this is the case, as well as giving details of sea conditions, tidal information and weather.



Buoy located off the pier at Bournemouth

The initiative was created in response to increasing demand for clearer, more accessible information about coastal water conditions. Sensor buoys positioned offshore collect environmental data which is analysed to provide users with up-to-date insights through the Sea Check webapp.

Since its re-launch in 2025, having moved out of 2024 Beta mode, the app has been warmly received by local cold-water swimming communities, who have welcomed the ability to access water quality information quickly and easily before entering the sea. Feedback from users has been positive, with one consistent suggestion for improvement: extending bacterial monitoring throughout the winter season.

In response, project partners are now trialling the retention of the sensor buoys in Bournemouth and Boscombe throughout the winter. The trial will assess the feasibility and safety of providing year-round bacterial monitoring. Wessex Water are also carrying out an analysis of the webapp alerts to assist in continued training of the AI.

Sea Check demonstrates how partnership working and innovative technology can create safer and more informed coastal communities. www.bcpseacheck.co.uk

Dorset Innovation Hub

Dorset's NHS organisations, public services, local authorities, academia, local business growth hub, and voluntary & community partners working together to use new innovations to support patients and our service users.

Our website contains key information including; about us, partner organisations, key documents, case studies, training opportunities, resources, FAQs, newsletters, blogs, news and events

For further information, please do visit our website or contact us

ourdorset.org.uk/innovation

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