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Special Issue Editorial: The Role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Workforce Development

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Welcome to Issue Number 2 of the *International Journal of Human Resource Development: Practice, Policy and Research* for 2025. This special issue is centred on the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in workforce development. Workforce development lies at the heart of human resource development (HRD) practice at strategic and operational levels within organizations across the globe, yet only limited coverage has been given to examining such issues within academic journals and research. As guest editors, we are therefore delighted to draw together a series of papers that add to the current academic literature and debates surrounding TVET, the role of education within this context, and its links to workforce development.



As we write this editorial, we are particularly conscious of the recent publication in the United Kingdom (UK) of the *Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper* by the UK government (HM Government, 2025). Publication of this white paper once again places the interplay between issues of education, skills development, and industrial strategy at the centre of political and educational debate. Embedded within such discourse is a continued suggestion that the primary purpose of education is to prepare individuals for the workplace. Yet there has also been recent emergent debate on the potential broader social and cultural impact that might result from continued development of TVET programmes. For example, Billett (2018) highlighted a need to improve the image of TVET programmes, emphasizing the importance of aligning their development more directly to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, Billett (2018) argues that there is scope for TVET programmes to better align with SDG 4, which refers to the need to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities” (United Nations, 2015, p. 19). Others emphasize the need to identify those strategies that might help to further strengthen

the link between TVET and the achievement of prosperity at both national and regional (including pan-regional) levels, and throughout organization and sectoral levels (Bhattarai, 2020).

Notwithstanding such challenges, TVET holds the potential to form an essential part of governmental or political industrial strategy, particularly in seeking to address issues around skills gaps and shortages, issues of workplace preparation, and raising productivity and performance (Fayyaleh & Fogarty, 2024). This special issue is therefore presented as a timely opportunity to reflect on the impact that TVET has upon skills development within the workforce, particularly as many modern economies and industries across the globe struggle with the need to raise skill levels and competencies. The articles within this special issue concentrate primarily on degree level TVET programmes from both academic and practitioner perspectives. Consideration of TVET within the higher education context is likewise timely, given current challenges and the emergence of “newer normal” ways of working in the post-COVID-19 period (Mathew et al., 2025, p. 207) that are evident for universities and other degree level providers in many countries. Whilst these articles do maintain a predominantly UK focus, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations stemming from each paper provide scope to open the debate on current implementation of degree level TVET programmes, which holds broader relevance to the ongoing development of educational and industrial strategies in the UK and beyond. The five articles that comprise this special issue therefore provide a standpoint and perspective to consider the future role for degree level TVET and how continued development of such programmes and initiatives will impact on workforce development in coming decades, particularly within the current global economic climate and plethora of drivers that are encompassing industrial

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strategies for various key stakeholders at regional, national, and international levels.

The first article within this special issue is a research paper by Alan Johnston, Steven Cock, Ruby Mathew, and Philip Coombes entitled *Degree Apprenticeships, Foundation Degrees, and Workforce Development in the United Kingdom: A Bibliometric Review and Research Agenda*. Based on processes of bibliometric analysis, the purpose of the paper is to analyse the current state of published research on foundation degrees and degree apprenticeships – the two predominant degree level TVET qualifications that are offered in the UK – as a basis to then advocate a future direction for ongoing research. In particular, the recommendations emerging from the paper include the need for future research that examines effective collaboration and partnerships between industry and education providers, the need for continued development of higher-level skills to meet the needs of contemporary organizations, and greater consideration of how competency is developed and assessed within TVET programmes. Two other areas that are highlighted include the need for longitudinal studies to provide a basis to assess the impact of TVET from a longer-term perspective alongside a need to also undertake further research into the duality of the apprentice experience as a member of both the workforce and as a student. Through such proposed research agendas, the authors argue that there is scope to further develop and expand current understanding of TVET programmes and their potential role in contributing to workforce development and attainment of future industrial strategies.

The second article is a research paper by Peter Greenan and Nicola Stenberg entitled *Management Development, Making it All Worthwhile: Introducing a Tripartite System of Transfer Grounded in the Relationships Inherent in an Apprenticeship Model of Delivery*. In their article, Greenan and Stenberg investigate the link between individuals and organizations who are involved in the tripartite relationship of employer, employee, and education provider within the context of TVET provision. Within their article, the authors draw upon the systems-based model of transfer, which supports the development of apprentices. The article highlights that although the systems-based model provides a holistic approach and conceptualization that could be evidenced as successful, there are a number of factors including the learning culture within the organization that need to be in place for the model to work effectively. As such, the authors advocate several key considerations as to how a more effective learning and delivery environment may be developed and embedded for the advancement of TVET programmes. They conclude by advocating a research agenda that calls for the systems-based model to be applied in wider contexts than just apprenticeship provision.

The third article is a research paper by Susan Walsh entitled *Degree Apprenticeships: Autoethnographic Insights into Academic Support for Degree Apprenticeships*. In this

article, Walsh provides a first-hand account of providing academic support to degree apprentices. Most notably, she identifies one of the key challenges faced by apprentices as they strive to manage the balance between full time work and their new enrolment and involvement in studying at degree level. Previous articles have concentrated on the delivery and teaching side of apprenticeship programmes. However, Walsh provides insight into the support needs of apprentices and the challenge of providing such support. The article draws upon key ideas and learning theories and then applies them in this specific apprenticeship context, identifying aspects such as trust, openness, and effective communication as being central to ensure the success of the apprentices. The paper concludes by identifying the importance of a collaborative approach to apprentice support systems that includes academic staff and that recognizes the strength of placing academic tutoring at the centre.

The fourth article is a conceptual paper authored by Rachel Lamb and Sarah Cooper titled *Barriers to Embedding Employability: Are Academics the Problem?* In their paper, Lamb and Cooper consider the employability agenda within UK higher education. The paper questions whether academics pose a key barrier in embedding employability and the development of employability skills within degree level programmes. In doing so, Lamb and Cooper offer a conceptual viewpoint including two case studies that examine how employability is (or can be) embedded within the fabric of higher education. In their article, they draw upon different perceptions of employability to discuss some of the challenges that are faced within what might be considered predominantly academic programmes. In their conclusions and recommendations, Lamb and Cooper suggest that closer consideration of aspects such as the use of authentic assessments to further facilitate the development of higher-level thinking skills is required to better embed employability-focused skills within TVET curricula. They suggest that higher-level thinking is an area of skills development that many academics feel has diminished as programmes have become more vocationalized. They conclude by outlining the need for a new conceptual model based upon the concepts of stakeholder circularity required to better align the roles, relevance, importance, and focus of different key stakeholders involved within degree programmes.

The fifth and final article within this special issue is a perspectives paper authored by Thomas Burton titled *Reclaiming the Vocational Mission: The 2025 Post 16 Skills White Paper*. As the title suggests, this article offers initial reflections on the *Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper* that was introduced by the UK Government in October 2025. In this article, Burton seeks to consider the future possible trajectories of TVET in the UK that could result from publication and implementation of this White Paper. Burton suggests that the White Paper is both ambitious and future focused, proposing that success will not be assured solely by the ambition that underpins these initiatives, but rather

the commitment to execute the changes that are proposed and required. Successful implementation of the White Paper will require the government, and future governments, to commit to the long-term project, whilst also requiring the higher education sector to also commit to the agenda.

In closing this editorial, we would like to thank the authors of each paper for their contributions to this special issue and, as a result, supporting the continued development of research that centres on degree level TVET. As we stated at the beginning of this editorial, TVET is often argued to be a key tool to support workforce development within organizations, business, and industry, but also has a central role to play in securing prosperity for individuals and other key stakeholders operating at local, regional, national, and international levels. We hope that the articles presented in this special issue offer further opportunity to understand the complex nexus of government, higher education providers, industry, and workers/apprentices, whilst also contributing to ongoing debate, discourse, analysis, and discussion on the effectiveness of such programmes and the ways in which TVET delivery may advance further in the future. Finally, we would like to thank the editorial board of the *International Journal of Human Resource Development: Practice, Policy and Research* for their support as well as the reviewing team for their hard work and diligence throughout the review process. We hope that readers of the Journal will find the articles within this special issue to be of interest, relevance, and value.

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About the Special Issue Editors



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Alan Johnston has a DBA from the University of Huddersfield. He is a Senior Lecturer in Management and Organisational Development at

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Steven Cock is a Senior Lecturer in Business and Management in York Business School at York St John University. He has worked in higher education for more than a decade, specialising primarily in areas linked to sports, events, leisure, hospitality and tourism management.

His research interests include the examination of long-term processes of organisational structure and change, as well as analysing underpinning power dynamics relating to a range of contemporary issues in modern business and workplace settings. Steven is co-founder and co-chair of the People in Employment Settings (PiES) Research Group at York St John University.