

# BAICE THEMATIC FORUM

## Invisible or hidden? Challenging discourses around 'skills deficit'

This seminar will explore dominant policy discourses around skills development and training programmes in international education and development. We will examine how such discourses are constructed from a perceived deficit of vocational education and training opportunities, rendering existing skills, literacy practices and skills development processes invisible. Starting with the two plenary presentations, we will break into smaller groups to look at three specific areas: academic skills; livelihood skills and migration; and digital skills.

### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**Professor Simon McGrath, University of Nottingham**  
*No NEET solutions: youth, skills and employability*

The orthodox vocational education and training account is redolent with language of deficit and moral culpability. Millions of young people are designated negatively as NEETS – not in employment, education and training – whilst public providers are routinely castigated for their failure to make these undeserving poor into good citizen-consumers by addressing their employability. Moreover, this account reduces young adults to narrow and atomistic economic individuals, rather than fully authentic humans existing in society. This presentation will suggest that a human development and capability reading can offer a richer alternative account that better balances agency and structure, and which gives work due prominence without reducing life to the economic sphere.

**Professor Alan Rogers, University of East Anglia**  
*'Skills deficit': what skills deficit? Looking again at skills in development from the bottom up*

In this presentation, drawing on experience of development programmes from the folk development colleges of Tanzania to more recent work in Afghanistan, I would like to re-examine three assumptions about skills in development programmes: a) the concept of widespread skills deficit at all levels, from individual to national, by pointing to the (largely tacit) funds of knowledge and banks of skills which trainees bring with them; b) the discourse of a deficit in vocational training by pointing to the ways these funds of knowledge and banks of skills have been learned through existing informal learning and traditional informal educational skills development activities in many societies; and c) the assumption that a minimum level of basic skills are required before vocational training can be effective by exploring the concept of embedded literacies and numeracies.