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SKILLS OF GENERATION Z DUAL STUDENTS ENTERING THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract
This study presents the results of research, conducted in 2024 at a Hungarian university which offers dual training programs in four study fields. A salient issue currently affecting dual training programs is the inadequate mutual understanding of expectations and requirements between students and employers. The research conducted focused on elucidating these expectations and enhancing mutual knowledge.
The labour market exhibits the presence of representatives from multiple generational cohorts. Members of Generation Z (born after 1995), who are just before or at the beginning of their professional careers, have different competencies and abilities from those of previous generations. In the study, we show the Person-Job Fit model and which competencies students believe are important in companies, assessing the extent to which these perceptions align with actual company expectations.

1 Introduction

The Hungarian design of the dual higher education (so called Kecskemét model) was inspired in 2009 by the establishment of the Mercedes Benz company in Kecskemét. Since Sági and Fülöp (2024) recently described the Hungarian dual higher education; therefore, we will not go into the specific features of the Hungarian dual training here. Noteworthy research findings regarding the essential soft skills in the context of Industry 5.0 (Varga, 2024a) served as a reliable foundation for further exploration.

Thanks to the Eu4DUAL project, several studies have already been published regarding the spread of dual education or work-based education in Europe. Among them there are also papers presenting national characteristics (Dragan & Hochrinnen, 2024; Dupouy & Bakni, 2024; Halista-Telus, 2023; Laukkanen et al., 2024; Merlo et al., 2023; Varga, 2024b, 2024c; Varga & Sági 2024; Viklund & Elgundi, 2024)

In analysing the entry of Generation Z employees into the labour market, we employ the Person-Job Fit model as a theoretical framework to guide our investigation. Person-Job Fit, defined as the alignment between an individual's characteristics and the demands of a specific job, serves as a critical framework for understanding how employees' satisfaction, performance, and retention can be influenced by their compatibility with their roles. By framing our research questions within this lens, we can logically explore how various factors—such as skills, values, and personality traits—interact with job demands and environments. (Edwards, 1991, Juhász, 2006, Chhabra 2015)

1.1 The career capital of Generation Z

The need for factual knowledge is decreasing among both employees and employers, and at the same time, organizations are looking for and expecting a solid foundation of basic knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies. According to Böhmer et al. (2020), career capital is the value of

skills and competencies created by the continuous improvement of the employee's career situation. The three basic elements of career capital (Böhmer et al. 2020):

- *Knowing-why:* identification with the world of work, understanding the meaning and significance of work, motivation and invested energy.
- *Knowing-how:* the implicit and explicit knowledge that the student/employee gathers regarding social and professional competencies during their professional career.
- *Knowing-whom:* networks, connections, information sources, reputation, which he/she builds during his/her career.

The authors also point out that the competence acquired in the dual training can be transposed and transferred to other workplaces, and through the network of relationships and individual development opportunities built up during the training, the student can also be tied to the company training place.

1.2 Person-Job Fit models

Person-Job Fit models appeared in the second half of the 20th century. Success, i.e. the real correspondence between the individual and the work, can be deduced from the degree of compatibility. A proven person can meet performance requirements in the long term, at a consistent level of performance, without harming their physical and mental health. The fact that someone can fill a given job does not mean suitability, and vice versa: it is not possible to deduce whether it will work out from the individual's suitability. Very importantly, aptitude is an indicator of a person's ability to meet the job criteria. "While career suitability means the potential correspondence between a person and a career, success shows a real correspondence." (Juhász, 2006)

The Person-Work Compliance Model developed by Edwards (1991) emphasizes the interaction between person and work. It defines person-to-work matching as a correspondence between a person's skills and job requirements, or a person's needs and job attributes. As Chhabra (2015) declares, it is a common recognition that person-work compliance has a huge impact on a person's behaviour and work performance.

However, we know that during workplace socialization, the "compatibility" of the new employee and his or her new workplace can improve by thoroughly getting to know and learning the norms and expectations of the workplace, perhaps with the help of a mentor or by participating in workplace trainings.

When examining the fit between person and work, work psychologists focus on the personal, social, interpersonal processes and the characteristics of the job because they can predict the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the person and the organization, which can lead to a decrease in performance and dissatisfaction. If the person and the job are highly compatible, the employee is capable of good performance and is motivated. However, there are also factors (e.g. money or physical security) which affect the efficiency of work. (Juhász, 2006)

2 Methodology

A qualitative content analysis, desktop research was carried out, we utilized publicly accessible resources, online databases, and statistical data from database of John von Neumann University (Hungary/Kecskemét) according to the institutional ethical guidelines of the University.

Based on the above, we were looking for answers to the following research questions:

- Q1: What are the expectations of companies towards prospective dual students?
- Q2: Are dual students aware of the company's expectations?

We conducted a questionnaire survey with 16 questions for students and for companies related to the two research questions above. The survey measured the students' and the dual partners' attitude on a Likert scale. The choice of an eight-point scale without a neutral midpoint is justified on

the grounds that it encourages respondents to make definitive choices rather than falling back on a neutral or indecisive option. An eight-point scale can provide clearer distinctions between varying levels of agreement or satisfaction, thereby offering richer insights into respondents' attitudes or behaviours. We expected more meaningful data, as it compels participants to lean towards either end of the scale, which can enhance the granularity of response data. (Nowlis et al, 2002)

The questionnaires were created in Google form format, they were completed online, voluntarily and anonymously. The results were evaluated using the SPSS program.

In the dual student questionnaire (we use the letter D and a number to identify the questions), we were looking forward to feedback on the qualities, hard and soft skills expected at the time of selection processes by the company (DH9), and the written and oral competencies expected in the chosen profession (DH10-DH11).

In the dual partnership questionnaire (we use the letter C and a number to identify the questions), we expected an answer to the expectations towards dual students: components of written and oral communication, knowledge, soft skills, and other competencies (C9-C11).

2.1 Questionnaire for dual students

In September 2024 all 239 dual students of John von Neumann University (full-time, BSc) were invited to fill out the questionnaire. At JvNU, students can choose dual training in four fields of study: engineering, IT, agriculture and economics. Nearly 73% of the dual students answered the questions (see Table 1). We aggregated the data by field of study. The agricultural field was excluded from the analysis because of insufficient data, which raises concerns about power considerations and potential sampling bias. Consequently, the results from the technical, IT, and economic fields were assessed. The distribution of the answers by field of study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of NJE dual students by fields of study and % distribution of respondents.

Study field	*Number of Dual students*	*Responses*	*Responses received in % compared to the number of students*
Economics	65	52	80.00%
Engineering	155	113	70.29%
IT	12	9	75.00%
Agriculture	7	4	57.14%
Total	239	178	74.47%

The percentage data indicate the proportion of respondents per study field.

Source: own edit.

2.2 Questionnaire for companies employing JvNU dual students

At the time of the survey, John von Neumann University had 58 dual partners. Dual partners who have already employed or are currently employing dual students, i.e. have experience in selecting and integrating dual students, were invited to fill out the questionnaire.

In terms of the number of employees, the responding companies were classified into small, medium-sized and large enterprise categories (10-49 employees by small enterprises, 50-249 employees by medium-sized enterprises, large enterprises with more than 250 employees).
Table 2-3 shows the number of responding students and the distribution of them by field of study and by company size. Most dual students and most of the responding students (94.3%) work for large companies. Concerning the study programs, students in the field of technology work in the largest proportion by large companies.

Table 2. Distribution of NJE dual students and responding dual students by company size in %

Partner companies	*Number of dual students*	*Number of responding dual students*	*Distribution of responding duals students by company size*
small businesses	12	3	1,7%
medium-sized enterprise	11	7	4%
Large enterprise	216	164	94,3%
Total	239	174	100%

Source: own edit

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by field of training and company size based on the responses

	company size			*Total*
	small	*medium*	*large*	
Engineering	0	4	104	108
	0,0%	57,1%	65,4%	63,9%
IT	1	1	7	9
	33,3%	14,3%	4,4%	5,3%
Economics	2	2	48	52
	66,7%	28,6%	30,2%	30,8%
Total	3	7	159	169
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: own edit

3 Results

3.1 Expectations of companies towards prospective dual students (Q1)

When organizations recruit a new employee, in this case a dual student, they already have an idea of who the ideal candidate would be. The expectations towards dual students can be divided into two groups. One of them includes the characteristics that can be checked during the selection, and the other part refers to the case of use as a dual student.

During the selection process, depending on the complexity of the selection process, the company ascertains the applicant's academic progress, academic results, language skills, written and oral communication skills, working in a group, mathematical and physical problem-solving skills, and also gets an idea of the motivation, interests and future plans of the dual student.

Based on the answers to question C3 of the questionnaire, we can see that the ideal candidates are motivated to continuous learning, have an open mind and an outstanding desire to work, for whom personal development and the desire to learn are more important than the opportunity to earn money. The candidates are open-minded, interested in the company's activities, and can communicate in English and/or German. The ideal dual students do not measure the time spent on internships at the company in terms of money. They are agile, humble, eager to learn. They receive a high level of theoretical training; their knowledge is up to date. They have the appropriate professional foundations and are interested in how the knowledge gained there can be used in the industry. The ideal dual students are committed to the company and to their chosen profession, they perform the work entrusted to them responsibly, meet deadlines and have the right desire to innovate. When evaluating the answers to the questions (the C9, C10, C11, C14 about expectations related to general characteristics, personality traits, competencies), I also looked at the results by company size, as I assumed that in large companies, where there are more interested people and there is a larger selection to choose from, the expectations will be higher. I will discuss the differences below.

On the Likert scale, the company received an average score of around 7 or above on average, which means that good task and problem-solving skills (average 6.96) and a tendency to fit in and work in a group (7.21) were considered very important. In oral communication, the highest average scores were given to asking questions (7.04), reading comprehension (7.25), clarity (7.25), politeness (7.0) and sense of responsibility (6.96), while the most effective motivational tools used by dual students were the recognition of work (7.0), working conditions (6.96) and the possibility of progress

(7.08). Good task and problem-solving skills (7.2), reading comprehension (7.27) and clarity (7.4) are considered important by large companies above average, and overall, it can be stated that large companies have the highest, i.e. above-average, scores for all the above-mentioned expectations. At the same time, contrary to the expectation of reading comprehension, the average score for Hungarian secondary school results was only 4.17 points, with only good manual dexterity being less expected, with an average score of 4.04. In the expectations of large companies, high school final exam results in Hungarian language and Literature received the lowest average score (3.73), suggesting that they do not see a connection between the level of reading comprehension and other communication skills and Hungarian high school results. Good verbal expression (6.87), good drafting skills (6.87) and good speaking skills (6.6) are expected.

The average score was below 6 for the previous practical experience (for example from a summer job) (4.58). A good result in mathematics (5.25, 5.0 in large companies) is not expected, even though engineering, information technology and economics majors participated in the study. This low value can be explained by two reasons: on the one hand, only students with good grades in mathematics are invited after the pre-screening to the job interview, and on the other hand, it can probably refer to the low predictive ability of secondary school academic results in relation to workplace performance (like the Hungarian results). Good foreign language skills (5.38 on average) are the least expected in medium-sized companies (3.86), while the expectation is above average in large companies (6.13). Stress tolerance (5.58 on average) is not emphasized, dual students are probably not exposed to a great amount of stress, and the expectation of endurance and good endurance is also low (5.58 on average, 4.0 in small companies).

On average, dual students are less expected to look good (5.83), which is least expected by large companies (5.53) and more by small companies (6.5). In the case of large companies, uniform workwear ensures the expected appearance, so it is less important what the dual students wear when they arrive at the workplace, as they must wear the clothes provided by the company.

As an example, in Figure 1, we present the expectations profile for mechanical engineering students. The highest value was achieved by good problem-solving skills (6.778) and the ability to work in a group (6.778), followed by knowledge/practicality, the ability to formulate professional ambitions, and a good sense of practice. The Hungarian secondary school results weigh the least.

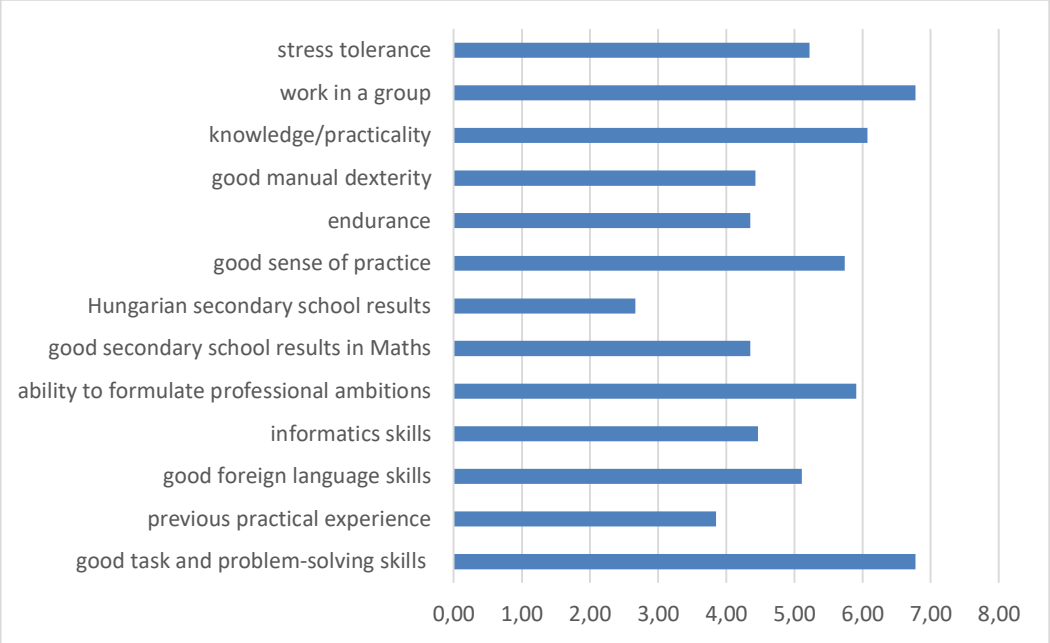

Figure 1. Importance of Competencies and Prior Experiences of Dual Students in Mechanical Engineering as Rated by Employers

3.2 Dual students' knowledge of the expectations placed on them (Q2)

Dual students had to answer the question of what qualities and skills are needed for the special field and profession they have chosen, and what companies expect. We summarized the results according to the three fields of training. In the field of technical training, we considered the responses of dual students of mechanical engineering, logistics engineering, vehicle engineering, IT engineering, and economics, business and marketing, finance and accounting, and international business. Since the number of respondents was exceptionally high in the technical field, the average values pull in this direction. I will mention the differences separately. Dual students believe that the most important factors in the selection process by the company are the ability to work in a group (6.97) and good task and problem-solving skills (6.91). Within this, group work seems to be the most pronounced among IT engineers (7.44), while good problem-solving skills were rated with the highest score by those in economics (7.08). The third place is occupied by awareness and practicality, which achieved a value of around 6.22 average points in all three fields of training. According to the scores, a good high school final exam results in Hungarian language and literature is the least expected of dual students (average 3.08), which reached the lowest score of 2.89 in engineering, but the field of economics rated it only at 3.52. Preliminary practical experience (from high school or summer jobs) scored an average of 3.72 points, which in the field of technology stopped at only 3.52 on average. Good stamina and endurance were rated very low (4.14), which was scored 4.17 for students in the technical field and 3.56 for IT students. It is interesting to look at the high school math results. On average, he scored only 4.51 points, which is surprising for these mathematics-emphasized majors. Technical and engineering students rated this at 4.58 points, while economics students rated it at 4.4 points, and the responding IT engineers rated it at 4.33 points.

Considering communication skills, clarity was indicated as the most important in all three fields of study (7.31 on average), followed by professionalism (7.29) and good oral expression (7.07) in the technical field. In the case of IT specialists, continuous feedback (7.0) and good drafting skills (6.89) are behind the clarity, while in economics majors, reading comprehension (7.0) and good expressive skills (6.9) are considered the most important. The human qualities in the questionnaire all received an average score of around 7, it seems that the respondents feel that almost all of them are very important: discipline, politeness, attentiveness, obedience, punctuality, precision, humility, sense of responsibility, curiosity. We have seen above that good looks have received a low average score (5.83) for companies, students rated this at 6.69 average points, but this can be explained by the fact that good looks are presumably not the same for Generation Z as they are for employers. The highest average score is seen for the sense of responsibility (7.34), which achieved a quite outstanding value of 7.75 points in the IT field, i.e. almost everyone rated it with the maximum score. Discipline (7.17) and politeness (7.31) also stand out, and both were scored highest by IT engineers (7.56 and 7.44, respectively).

3.3 Harmony of corporate expectations and student ideas

From the above, dual students are aware that the most important expectations in companies are good task and problem-solving skills, as well as the inclination and ability to integrate and work in groups. Table 4 shows the scores of the expectations for the three fields of study (engineering, IT, economics). On a scale of 1 to 8, companies and students rated very similar values on knowledge, practicality, good foreign language skills and stress tolerance. Companies valued prior practical experience, IT knowledge, good stamina and workload, and a good sense of practice with a higher value than students. According to the results, students do not feel the importance of good secondary school results (Hungarian, mathematics) and professional ambitions to a sufficient extent.

Table 4. Scores of expectations by students and companies (independent sample t test)

Competencies		*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t-test significance value**
good task and problem-solving skills	students	171	6,92	1,359	0,998
	companies	26	6,92	1,44	
prior practical experience	students	171	3,71	2,048	0,038**
	companies	26	4,62	2,099	
foreign language skills	students	171	5,37	1,985	0,970
	companies	26	5,38	2,192	
IT knowledge	students	171	5,05	1,778	0,002**
	companies	26	6,23	1,608	
professional ambitions	students	171	6,02	1,616	0,241
	companies	26	6,42	1,604	
good result in Maths	students	171	4,52	1,962	0,188
	companies	26	5,08	2,244	
good results in Hungarian	students	171	3,09	1,842	0,011**
	companies	26	4,12	2,197	
good stamina and workload	students	171	4,16	2,138	0,001**
	companies	26	5,65	2,058	
good practical sense	students	171	5,71	1,82	0,064*
	companies	26	6,42	1,724	
good drafting skills	students	171	3,69	2,107	0,390
	companies	26	4,08	2,296	
practicality	students	171	6,21	1,599	0,455
	companies	26	6,46	1,555	
ability to integrate and work in groups	students	171	6,97	1,408	0,382
	companies	26	7,23	1,423	
stress tolerance	students	171	5,36	1,893	0,324
	companies	26	5,54	1,881	

*Note: Based on the Levene test, the significance value of the corresponding t test is ** - significant at 5%, * - significant at 10%*

Source: own edit

With the Levene test, we examined the similarity of the standard deviation of the two samples. Based on this, I selected the appropriate T test for equality of the means. In the table, the level of significance of the corresponding T test is indicated. We took 5% and 10% as the significance levels. As indicated in the table, a significant difference of 10% was found in the case of good practical sense. At 5%, we experienced a significant difference in previous practical experience, IT knowledge, good Hungarian language and literature high school final exam results, and workload. Regarding the standard deviation, which shows the average deviation of the sample elements from the sample mean, we can see that the values range from 1.359 to 2.296. The variation of student and company responses was the most different in the case of good foreign language skills, good

high school final exam results in mathematics and Hungarian language and literature, and good manual dexterity.

Examining the results and significance values by field of study, we can see that significant differences between student and company responses are more pronounced in the field engineering: in the case of prior practical experience, IT knowledge, good stamina, workload, good practical sense and good manual dexterity, there are differences between the expectations of companies and the students' knowledge of them. In engineering careers, these are necessary or even essential; therefore, so it is worth focusing on them. In the field of economics, only good stamina and endurance were not sufficiently known to students. In the field of IT training, there was no significant difference between the responses of companies and students.

4 Conclusions

The dual higher education is characterized by the fact that the training takes place based on one curriculum, but at two locations. In response to the needs of the labour market, this form of training involves integrating the corporate sector into the training and provides an opportunity for students to acquire knowledge that has not been taught or cannot be acquired in a higher education institution or cannot be acquired sufficiently as an employee of an organisation. The result of the training is a fresh graduate employee who has 7 semesters of practical experience, who has acquired specific professional knowledge related to a given company, and who has gained skills in corporate culture in addition to his grade.

The research question Q1 concerned the expectations of companies towards prospective dual students. The research results show that companies place high expectations on dual students due to the energy (financial resources, human resources, time) to be invested in the 6-7 semesters of dual training. The ideal candidate is not only motivated to learn formally and non-formally but also is interested in the company's activities and how the knowledge gained at the university can be used in industry. Even though, according to the survey, high school results do not weigh much, the applicant must still arrive with good academic results and be able to communicate in at least one foreign language. The ideal dual student is a good team player and has good task and problem-solving skills.

The research question Q2 related to the previous one was about if dual students are familiar with the company's expectations, and whether they know what skills, competencies and knowledge they need to have. The results show that dual students are aware that good task and problem-solving skills, as well as the inclination and ability to integrate and work in groups, are the most important expectations for them at the company. (Assessing this ability is also part of the selection process in many places.) Similarly to companies, students valued knowledge, practicality, good foreign language skills and stress tolerance. Students feel less important about previous practical experience, IT knowledge, good stamina and workload, and a good sense of practice. According to the results, students do not feel the weight of good high school results (Hungarian, mathematics) and professional ambitions to a sufficient extent, which can be attributed to the fact that this is almost not mentioned at all during the selection process, as basically applicants whose academic results are already above the level considered sufficient by the company are invited for selection. The biggest difference between expectations and students' knowledge of this was found in the field of technical training, where there was a significant difference in previous practical experience, IT knowledge, good stamina, workload, good practical sense and good manual dexterity.

Companies compile the elements of the selection process depending on the level of development of their HR organization. Large companies can require candidates to perform personality tests and trial jobs to predict the company-person-work correspondence. This practice should be applied to all companies. To increase the number of dual students and thus the number of candidates, it is recommended to hold open days at companies employing dual students, where high school students can get to know the company's expectations, where they can get acquainted with the corporate environment and learn about possible jobs within the company with the same degree. It is also recommended to communicate to prospective dual students that previous practical experience (e.g.

through a summer job) is an advantage in the selection. All of this would greatly reduce uncertainty for candidates at the time of application and during the selection process.

The aim of the research was to collect and analyse data to collect information on the labour market characteristics of Generation Z dual students, and to support the success of dual students in the workplace during their university studies, if necessary, after exploring the expectations of the company. For dual training to be successful, it is important that prospective students are aware of the expectations of their chosen profession and their own abilities. The selection of the most suitable participants in dual training and the promotion of workplace integration is in the common interest of those concerned (student, company, higher education institution). Knowledge of the competencies and personal qualities expected in each field of study can make it easier for future dual students to choose a study program, prepare for the selection event, and thus contribute to the success of the selection process in the future.

To facilitate the successful integration of Generation Z dual students into the workplace, HR practitioners should implement structured pre-placement orientation days that clearly communicate the expectations of both the industry and the specific organization. These orientation sessions should include workshops that outline essential competencies and personal qualities relevant to each field of study, interactive exercises that allow students to assess their abilities, and networking opportunities with current employees to provide real-world insights. This proactive approach will enhance dual students' understanding of their roles and responsibilities, ultimately fostering a smoother transition and greater success in their dual training experiences.

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