

EDITORIAL — INAUGURATING A EUROPEAN VOICE FOR DUAL HIGHER EDUCATION

European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education (ESJ DHE), Vol. 1, No. 1, (2025)

Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ulf-Daniel Ehlers¹

¹ Chief Editor, European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education
EU4Dual European University Alliance
Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW), NextEducation

1 A Historical Beginning: Launching the European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education

With this issue, we are proud to inaugurate the *European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education (ESJ DHE)* — a journal born within and shaped by the **EU4Dual European University Alliance**. This inaugural publication marks a **historic moment**: for the first time, an academic journal dedicated entirely to *dual higher education (DHE)* — its theory, research, and practice — brings together scholars, practitioners, and institutions across Europe to exchange insights, evidence, and visions.

This launch is not merely an academic milestone but also a symbolic act of collaboration. *Many hands and minds have contributed to this creation* — researchers, practitioners, editors, reviewers, and alliance partners. As Chief Editor, I am both humbled and proud that this collective endeavor now provides a **scientific voice** for the field of dual higher education, strengthening its position within the broader European discourse on the future of learning, work, and skills.

The journal is situated within the EU4Dual alliance's mission to **integrate learning and work, theory and practice**, education and innovation. It aspires to document, analyse, and inspire the evolution of dual higher education across Europe and beyond — supporting evidence-based dialogue among universities, companies, policymakers, and students.

2 Future Skills as a Compass for Dual Education

At the heart of this issue lies the concept of **Future Skills** — the abilities and competencies individuals need to act responsibly, creatively, and effectively in transforming societies and workplaces.

The discussion about *soft skills* has evolved substantially in recent years. Increasingly, these are recognised not as “soft” or supplementary, but as **core enablers** of human capability in the age of AI, automation, and globalisation. Future Skills encompass **cognitive, social, and reflective capacities** that empower people to adapt, co-create, and transform — to be *agents* rather than *subjects* of change.

In dual higher education, Future Skills are developed in authentic contexts — where learning meets work, reflection meets practice, and education meets enterprise. They represent the **connective tissue** of modern curricula: linking academic theory to real-world responsibility, innovation, and ethics.

Thus, dual education becomes not merely a mode of delivery but a **philosophy of learning** — one that integrates experiential learning, critical reflection, and societal relevance. This first issue presents research that collectively illuminates how Future Skills emerge, can be measured, and can be sustained within dual learning systems.

3 The Articles in this Inaugural Issue

This first issue of the *ESJ DHE* presents six peer-reviewed articles — diverse in topic, but unified in purpose: to strengthen the scientific understanding of dual education as a driver for competence development, innovation, and inclusion.

1. The Influence of Dual Higher Education Programmes and Work Experiences on Soft Skills Development in Master’s Degree Students (*Iraia Urkia-Basterra, Ainara Imaz Agirre and Paula Álvarez-Huerta*)

This opening article establishes the conceptual foundation for the issue. It investigates how dual programmes and work-based experiences contribute to students’ development of key Future Skills such as communication, adaptability, and self-efficacy. Quantitative evidence from master’s students demonstrates the *added value of structured work integration* and provides a valuable framework for subsequent studies.

2. Analysis of Soft Skills in Dual Higher Education Students: Pilot Validation (*Szilvia Varga and Norberta Sági*)

Focusing on measurement and validation, this contribution presents the development of a new instrument for assessing soft (Future) Skills in dual students. Through pilot testing and psychometric evaluation, the authors show both the complexity and feasibility of scientifically assessing competencies that go beyond technical knowledge — a cornerstone for future empirical work in this field.

3. Skills of Generation Z Dual Students Entering the Workplace (*Norberta Sági*)

The third article turns to the perspective of a new generation. By comparing expectations between dual students and employers, the study reveals alignment gaps and perception differences that affect recruitment and retention. Grounded in the Person–Job Fit model, it offers a nuanced view of how Future Skills shape employability and organisational integration for Generation Z.

4. Internationalisation and Work Life Skills Across the Baltic Sea: The KUT–Savonia COIL Project (*Joanna Stankiewicz-Majkowska and Irene Hyrkstedt*)

This contribution exemplifies *innovative practice*: a pilot Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project connecting students from Poland and Finland within the EU4Dual alliance. The study demonstrates how international virtual teamwork fosters linguistic confidence, intercultural competence, and work-life skills — embodying the EU4Dual spirit of cooperation and experiential learning.

5. Enhancing Objective and Holistic Assessment in Dual Higher Education: A Multidimensional Rubric Approach (*Mikel Ezkurra, Amaia Gomendio, David Alonso de Mezquía, Leire Markuerkiaga and Josu Galarza*)

Bridging research and practice, this article introduces a comprehensive rubric model for assessing students’ workplace learning. By integrating self-, peer-, and company-based evaluation, the authors provide a robust tool for quality assurance and reflective learning in dual settings — a key contribution to the evidence-based management of Future Skills.

6. Understanding Student Dropout in Hungarian Technical Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Study (*Zsolt F. Kovács*)

The final article widens the perspective toward institutional and systemic challenges. Addressing student dropout through a mixed-methods lens, it connects individual learning experiences to

structural conditions of dual programmes. Kovács' findings underline that developing and sustaining Future Skills also requires supportive institutional cultures, flexibility, and social inclusion.

4 A Shared European Mission

Collectively, these six contributions illustrate the **diversity, maturity, and transformative potential** of dual higher education across Europe. They connect theory, empirical evidence, and pedagogy — from validation studies to practical interventions — while all operating under the shared framework of **EU4Dual**, one of the European University Alliances fostering sustainable innovation and regional anchoring.

This inaugural issue demonstrates how collaboration within EU4Dual already produces tangible scientific outputs and cross-border synergies. Each article, in its own way, contributes to building a European research community around dual higher education — a field that unites *learning, working, and innovation* for a more resilient and capable Europe.

5 Looking Ahead

As Chief Editor, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all authors, reviewers, section editors, and alliance colleagues who made this first issue possible. Your dedication and belief in the idea of a *European journal for dual higher education* have turned a long-standing vision into reality.

This is a **beginning** — not only for a journal but for a shared intellectual space where evidence, reflection, and innovation can meet. I hope that the *European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education* will serve as a **platform of trust and inspiration**, strengthening the academic foundations of our field and supporting the next generation of dual learners, educators, and researchers.

May this first issue — the *historical foundation* of our journal — inspire many to contribute, collaborate, and co-create the future of dual higher education in Europe and beyond.

Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ulf-Daniel Ehlers

Chief Editor, European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education

EU4Dual European University Alliance

Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW), NextEducation