

EDITORIAL — RECONFIGURING HIGHER EDUCATION: NEW LEARNING SPACES, PRACTICE INTEGRATION, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education (ESJ DHE), Vol. 2, No. 3 (2026)

Prof. Dr. Ulf-Daniel Ehlers¹ and Prof. Dr. Martin Lachmair²

*¹ Editor-in-Chief, European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education
EU4Dual European University Alliance*

Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW), NextEducation

*² Conference Chair of the 2025 Annual Conference of the German Society for Higher Education Research
(Gesellschaft für Hochschulforschung - GfHf) and
Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW)*

Dear readers,

This issue is the second of two companion issues emerging from the 2025 annual conference of the German Society for Higher Education Research (Gesellschaft für Hochschulforschung – GfHf) in Heilbronn. The first issue examined societal relevance, Future Skills, artificial intelligence, and institutional and curricular transformation. This second issue continues that conversation by turning to the spaces, relationships, and organisational arrangements through which transformation is enacted.

Publishing the collection in two parts makes visible an important distinction within a shared field of inquiry. Higher education must ask what purposes it serves and what competences it should foster; it must also ask where learning takes place, how academic and professional worlds are connected, and who is able to participate successfully. The six contributions gathered here address this second set of questions through digital learning environments, agile professional learning, industry–university partnerships, third learning spaces, transfer-oriented research, and educational inequality.

The issue opens with *Fostering Autonomy in STEM Education – The Use of Jupyter Notebooks in Higher Education*. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, the contribution examines how digital infrastructures can support autonomy in higher education. Its focus is not technology for its own sake, but the design of accessible, interactive, and professionally relevant learning environments. The article thus reminds us that digital tools become educationally meaningful only when they expand learners' capacity to explore, act, and take responsibility for their learning.

Bildung verNetz – Designing an Agile Learning Format for Employees at Educational Institutions widens the perspective from student learning to professional learning within educational organisations. By focusing on an agile, practice-oriented, and network-based format, the contribution shows how continuing development can be organised as a collaborative process rather than a sequence of isolated training events. It highlights the importance of exchange, iteration, and sustained engagement when institutions seek to build capacity for change.

Win-Win-Win for Industry, Research and Individuals: Supervisors' Insights from Tandem Programme at TH Köln moves into the field of partnership-based research training. Through the perspectives of supervisors in academia and industry, the article explores the promise and complexity of integrated doctoral and postdoctoral qualification pathways. Such formats can create value for individuals, research, and industry, but they also require careful coordination, mutual recognition, and clarity about expectations. Practice integration, the contribution demonstrates, is not produced by proximity alone; it depends on durable relationships and supportive structures.

* To cite this editorial: Ehlers, U.-D. and Lachmair, M. (2026). Editorial — Reconfiguring Higher Education: New Learning Spaces, Practice Integration, and Social Responsibility. *European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education (ESJ DHE)*, 2 (3), i-ii. <https://doi.org/10.82321/07ma-34m68>

The Third Learning Space in Dual Higher Education: A Systematic Review provides a synthesising conceptual frame for many of these concerns. By mapping adjacent literatures on third spaces, boundary crossing, work-integrated learning, and learning-place cooperation, the review examines how theory and practice can be connected through intermediary, learner-centred spaces. The idea of a third learning space is powerful precisely because it does not reduce integration to the transfer of knowledge from one location to another. It draws attention to reflection, translation, and the creation of new knowledge across institutional boundaries.

Caught between Technical Expertise and Transdisciplinary Structure Formation: Opportunities and Prospects for (Institutionalised) Competence Building in Transfer-Oriented Research brings the question of mediation into the context of socially engaged research. It analyses the tensions that arise when higher education institutions seek to support transdisciplinary and co-creative work while remaining embedded in disciplinary structures, established career paths, and conventional definitions of expertise. The article makes clear that transfer-oriented competence cannot depend solely on individual commitment. If it is to endure, it requires institutional recognition and structure.

The issue closes with *Social Inequality of Academic Success*. This final contribution provides a necessary corrective to any account of innovation that focuses only on new tools, formats, or partnerships. Transformative opportunities are never distributed evenly, and educational success is shaped by social conditions that institutions must recognise rather than treat as external to teaching and learning. The article therefore places questions of participation and justice at the heart of the debate about the future of higher education.

Taken together, the contributions show that new learning spaces are not defined primarily by architecture or technology. They are relational arrangements in which boundaries are crossed, responsibilities are renegotiated, and different forms of knowledge encounter one another. A Jupyter environment, an agile learning journey, a tandem programme, a third learning space, or a transfer-oriented research structure becomes educationally significant when it enables autonomy, collaboration, reflection, and meaningful participation.

At the same time, the issue resists celebratory simplification. Hybrid arrangements can create new possibilities, but they also generate coordination demands and may reproduce existing inequalities. Partnerships can connect institutions with professional and social contexts, but only when roles, resources, and recognition are addressed. Innovation can widen access to learning, but it can also privilege those already best positioned to benefit. Social responsibility must therefore be treated not as a separate theme, but as a criterion by which educational transformation is judged.

Read alongside the first companion issue, this collection offers a differentiated account of higher education's present transformation. The first issue asked how societal relevance, competence, AI, and institutional identity are being redefined. This issue asks how those redefinitions take form in learning environments, partnerships, transfer structures, and patterns of participation. The two perspectives belong together. Meaningful transformation requires both compelling purposes and robust arrangements through which those purposes can be realised.

We hope that the two companion issues will stimulate further research and conversation across disciplines, institutions, and national contexts. We thank all authors, reviewers, and editors for making this publication possible and for contributing to a shared effort to understand higher education as a space of mediation between technology and pedagogy, theory and practice, institutional continuity and change, individual development and collective responsibility.

Prof. Dr. Ulf-Daniel Ehlers

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

Prof. Dr. Martin Lachmair

Conference Chair of the 2025 Annual Conference German Society for Higher Education Research (Gesellschaft für Hochschulforschung - GfHf)
Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW)