

EU4Dual ALLIANCE



Policy White Paper 2026

Dual Higher Education for European Competitiveness:
Evidence and Recommendations from the EU4Dual Alliance

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3rd Edition

Note: This White Paper is a living document. It will be updated periodically to reflect the evolving EU policy landscape, the expanding membership of the EU4DUAL Alliance, and the accumulation of implementation evidence across partner institutions.



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About this Paper/Preliminary

P.1 Purpose and Scope

This EU4DUAL Policy White Paper provides evidence-based policy guidance for the development of dual higher education at European, national, regional, and institutional levels. It draws on four years (2023-2026) of transnational implementation by the EU4DUAL alliance, a consortium of nine professional higher education institutions across nine countries, with over 18,000 business stakeholders, to identify what policy conditions are required for dual higher education to deliver on its potential.

This paper is not a legislative proposal. It does not advocate a single European model of dual higher education; the diversity of national higher education systems is a structural feature of the European landscape, not a problem to be eliminated. Nor does it replace decision-making at the institutional, national, or EU level. Its function is to inform that decision-making by translating operational experience into actionable policy guidance.

Chapter 1 sets out the policy context within which the paper's recommendations are situated. It maps the principal EU-level frameworks relevant to dual higher education, including the Union of Skills, the European Degree Label, the Competitiveness Compass, the Draghi report on EU competitiveness and the Herning Declaration, and identifies where current policy frameworks create conditions for progress and where gaps remain.

Chapter 2 presents the evidence base. The evidence is organised around six operational domains, reflecting the alliance's consolidated structure: governance, quality, and institutional sustainability; the Centre of Excellence in dual higher education; joint programmes and credential recognition; research and innovation for competitiveness; mobility and cross-border work-based learning; and stakeholder engagement and regional impact. Each domain draws on documented outcomes from the 2022–2026 operational cycle. This chapter also offers evidence and an analysis from the Teachers and Researchers Network Taskforce (TRN) questionnaire.

Chapter 3 translates that evidence into policy recommendations. Recommendations are organised by governance level, European, national, regional, alliance, and institutional, to reflect the differentiated responsibilities and legal competences of the audiences this paper addresses. Each recommendation is traceable to the evidence presented in Chapter 2 and is meant for the governance level with the authority and capacity to act on it.

Chapter 4 sets out the call to action, identifying the priority steps required at each governance level and setting out the conditions under which EU4DUAL's model and findings are transferable to other alliances and institutional contexts.

The paper also includes a Policy Brief (refer to Annex 2), presented at the outset, which distils eight recommendations addressed to two governance levels: the EU level (Recommendations 1–5) and the national and regional level (Recommendations 6–8), into a concise, extractable format. The Policy Brief is designed for Commission services, national ministries, and regional authorities who require direct access to the paper's actionable recommendations without reference to the full evidence base.

P.2 Target Audience

EU4dual aims to reach primarily the European Commission services responsible for education, employment, and industrial policy, national ministries responsible for higher education, skills, and labour, and regional authorities involved in education and economic development.

Additionally, EU4dual aims to also inspire other European University alliances exploring work-integrated learning models, social partners and employer organisations engaged in skills policies, and vocational education and training (VET) stakeholders, including national VET agencies and bodies such as Cedefop and

the European Training Foundation, for whom the intersection of higher education and workplace learning raises shared governance questions.

P.3 Relationship to Previous Editions Policy Papers

Each edition of the EU4DUAL Policy White Paper has served a distinct function, reflecting the alliance's progression from vision to evidence.

The first edition (2024) established the conceptual foundations of dual higher education at European level. It articulated the defining characteristics of the dual model, made the case for its relevance to European competitiveness and skills challenges, and set out the alliance's initial strategic ambitions. Its primary function was definitional: to establish a shared vocabulary and a basis for collective action.

The second edition (2025) reported on the early results of transnational implementation. It documented what the alliance had learned from operating across nine national systems — on programme design, industry partnership, mobility, and governance — and began translating that experience into policy-relevant observations. Its primary function was diagnostic: to surface where the dual model worked, where it encountered systemic barriers, and what those barriers revealed about the limitations of existing policy frameworks.

The 2026 edition takes a further step. Previous editions documented what the alliance observed and heard from its stakeholders. This edition sets out what should change and why. The evidence gathered over four years of operation, combined with significant shifts in EU policy, including the Union of Skills, the European Degree Label, and the Competitiveness Compass, now provides a foundation to make specific, concrete recommendations. Each recommendation in this paper identifies what needs to change, who has the authority to change it, and what evidence supports that call.

Edition	Function	Description
2024	Vision	Established the alliance's founding mission and strategic orientation for dual higher education at European level.
2025	Stakeholder feedback	Synthesised structured input from all stakeholder councils gathered through annual conferences in Malta (2024) and the Basque Country (2025). Identified priority themes and early recommendations grounded in stakeholder experience.
2026	Policy guidance	Translates four years of implementation evidence into actionable policy recommendations, organised by governance level. Aligned with the alliance's 2027–2028 work programme and the current EU policy landscape, including the Union of Skills, the Competitiveness Compass, and the Herning Declaration.

The 2026 edition organises content by governance level, reflecting its function as a decision-support tool. Recommendations in this edition trace back to documented alliance experience.

This White Paper is a living document. It will be updated periodically to reflect the evolving EU policy landscape, the expanding membership of the EU4DUAL Alliance, and the accumulation of implementation evidence across partner institutions.

P.4 Subsidiarity and Multi-Level Governance

Education policy sits primarily at national level under Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The Union contributes to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, where necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action. It fully respects the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems.

This paper operates within that framework. It does not propose harmonisation of national dual higher education systems. Rather, it identifies actions at three governance levels: EU, national and regional, and institutional, based on where the relevant policy lever sits.

P.5 The Alliance's Evolving Strategic Framework - From Grand Challenges (2023-2026 to Knowledge Valorisation Hubs (2026 - 2028)

Since its establishment, the EU4DUAL alliance organised its research, innovation, and educational activities around **three Grand Challenges: Future of Work, Green Economy, and Healthy Living**. These provided the thematic architecture for both the alliance's research collaboration (Section 2.4) and its joint programme portfolio (Section 2.3): the Joint Dual Master's in Digital and Sustainable Manufacturing Engineering under Future of Work, and the Green Economy and Sustainability Future and Healthy Living programmes under their respective Grand Challenges.

While this thematic architecture worked well for structuring the joint programme portfolio, four years of implementation demonstrated that the Grand Challenges were too broad to serve as the direct organising unit for productive cross-institutional research collaboration specifically. Researchers assigned to the same Grand Challenge often worked on problems that were thematically adjacent but methodologically and industrially distinct. The breadth of the themes made it difficult to establish the shared focus required for co-authored outputs, joint funding applications, or structured industry co-creation.

This was not a design failure. It was a foreseeable consequence of operating at scale across nine institutions in nine countries with diverse research profiles and industrial contexts. The finding is one of the most significant pieces of implementation evidence generated by the current cycle (2023-2026): thematic alignment at the strategic level is necessary but not sufficient for productive transnational collaboration. What is additionally required is a narrower operational focus, concrete prerequisites for participation, and a direct connection between research activities and educational delivery.

In response to this implementation evidence, the 2027–2028 work programme introduces **Knowledge Valorisation Hubs (KVHs)** as the operational mechanism for research and innovation collaboration. The Grand Challenges are retained as the strategic thematic layer, but each is now operationalised through one or more Hubs with a significantly narrower focus.

Each Hub must meet five prerequisites before becoming operational: participation from at least four partner institutions; commitment of entire research groups or departments, not isolated individuals; demonstrated industry engagement through existing valorisation contracts or co-funded agreements; delivery of at least one core educational mechanism; and a thematic focus narrow enough that participants share sufficient common ground for joint work to be productive.

P.6 Authors and Acknowledgements

The lead author of this paper was done by Francesca Attard (MCAST/Malta), with coordination from General Secretary Dr. Kai Schmidt-Eisenlohr (DHBW/Germany) and team contributions from Dr Virág Mihálka (NJE/Hungary), Dr Jérémie Faham (ESTIA/France), the Work Package 7 Stakeholder Engagement Team,

and the Work Package 7 Centre of Excellence Team. The paper benefited from external review by Dr Virpi Laukkanen (Savonia/Finland) and Guy Haug (EU4dual Advisory Board Representative).

Stakeholder contributors. The evidence and recommendations in this paper draw on structured input from the Industry Consultative Council, the Regional Consultative Council, the Student Council, the Business Outreach Committee, the Advisory Board, and the Teachers and Researchers Network Taskforce. The April 2026 stakeholder consultations served as the primary validation mechanism for the recommendations set out in this paper.

Institutional endorsement. This paper was reviewed and endorsed by the Governing Board, the Rectors Council, the Academic Council, the General Secretariat, the Central Office, and the alliance's stakeholder councils prior to publication.

Disclaimer. This paper represents the collective position of the EU4DUAL alliance. It does not constitute legal advice, nor does it bind any individual partner institution, national government, or European institution. The recommendations are offered as evidence-based guidance for consideration within the appropriate governance and legislative frameworks.

Abbreviations

AASP — Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnics (Serbia; associated partner)

AISBL — Association Internationale Sans But Lucratif (international non-profit association under Belgian law)

BIP — Blended Intensive Programme

BOC — Business Outreach Committee

CSRD — Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive

DHE — Dual Higher Education

DHBW — Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg (Germany; full partner)

DG EAC — Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission

DG EMPL — Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

DG GROW — Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission

ECTS — European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EEA — European Education Area

EFQM — European Foundation for Quality Management

EHEA — European Higher Education Area

ENQA — European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQF — European Qualifications Framework

ERA — European Research Area

ERDF — European Regional Development Fund

ESF+ — European Social Fund Plus

ESG — Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

ESTIA — École Supérieure des Technologies Industrielles Avancées (France; full partner)

EU4DUAL — European Dual Studies University Alliance

FHJ — FH JOANNEUM Gesellschaft mbH (Austria; full partner)

ICC — Industry Consultative Council

JvNU — John von Neumann University (Hungary; associated partner)

KUT — Koszalin University of Technology / Politechnika Koszalinska (Poland; full partner)

KVH — Knowledge Valorisation Hub

MCAST — Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (Malta; full partner)

MU — Mondragon Unibertsitatea (Spain; coordinator)

PAR — PAR University of Applied Sciences (Croatia; full partner)

PPU — Portalegre Polytechnic University / Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre (Portugal; full partner)

RCC — Regional Consultative Council

S4+ — Smart Specialisation Strategy for Sustainability

SAVONIA — Savonia University of Applied Sciences (Finland; full partner)

SME — Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

TRN — Teachers and Researchers Network

TFEU — Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

VET — Vocational Education and Training

WACE — World Association of Cooperative Education (associated partner)

WoW — World of Work

Glossary

Dual Higher Education (DHE) As used in this paper: higher education in which the workplace constitutes a second, formally structured learning environment, with curriculum-defined learning outcomes, employer co-supervision, and integrated quality assurance alongside academic study, rather than an optional or supplementary placement. EU4DUAL's own DHE Framework operationalises this distinction through, among other criteria, a minimum ECTS allocation to supervised workplace learning and formal tripartite agreements between institution, employer, and student (see Section 2.3); national systems vary considerably in how this threshold is set. DHE may characterise an individual programme, as with EU4DUAL's joint dual master's programmes, or, in some national systems, an institution's overall identity, as with Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg. There is no single official EU legislative definition of this term.

DHE Quality Label The DHE Quality Label identifies programmes that meet the structural criteria of dual higher education as defined by the DHE Framework (see DHE Framework); it is not a substitute for national accreditation or compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines.

European Degree Label (Joint European Degree Label): A quality label awarded to joint higher education programmes delivered by consortia of at least two degree-awarding institutions from at least two EU Member States, recognising that the programme meets common European criteria on programme organisation, quality assurance, and European dimension priorities. The label is awarded following assessment by a competent quality assurance body and constitutes a first phase towards a possible future joint European degree, the introduction of which remains subject to a future Council decision.

Sources: Council Recommendation of 12 May 2025 on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education, OJ C/2025/3006; Operational Guide for the Joint European Degree Label, European Commission, 2026 (NC-01-26-123-EN-N).

Higher VET Vocational education and training provision at EQF levels 5–8, for instance, advanced vocational qualifications or professional bachelor's and master's degrees. Whether such provision sits within or outside the Bologna/EHEA higher education degree architecture varies considerably by national system: in some Member States it remains a parallel vocational track outside HE; in others it has been integrated into the HE degree system. Higher VET is related to, but distinct from, Dual Higher Education as used in this paper: both typically involve substantial workplace-integrated learning at EQF 6–8, but DHE as defined here denotes Bologna-recognised degree programmes, whereas the HE status of Higher VET qualifications depends on national arrangements. The convergence between the two tracks, and its implications for parity of esteem, is addressed in Section 1.2.3 (Herning Declaration).

Knowledge Valorisation Hub (KVH) As used in this paper: operational research and innovation structures within the EU4DUAL alliance designed to connect research activities, educational programmes, and industry collaboration around defined thematic areas. There is no EU legislative definition of this term.

Micro-credentials Micro-credential' means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity. *Source: Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, OJ C 243/02.*

Smart Specialisation Strategy for Sustainability (S4+) As used in EU cohesion policy: a place-based regional innovation policy approach characterised by the identification of strategic areas for intervention based on analysis of economic strengths and potential, combined with an Entrepreneurial Discovery Process involving wide stakeholder participation. The S4+ designation reflects the integration of sustainability objectives into smart specialisation from the 2021–2027 programming period. There is no single binding EU legislative definition of the S4+ term. *Reference: European Commission Smart Specialisation Platform; Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation).*

Union of Skills A European Commission strategy (COM(2025) 90, March 2025) to develop quality, inclusive, and adaptable education, training, and skills systems in order to increase EU competitiveness. It is organised around four strands: building skills for quality jobs; upskilling and reskilling for the digital and green transitions; circulating skills across the EU; and attracting and retaining talent. *Source: Communication from the Commission, COM(2025) 90 final, 5 March 2025.*

Work-integrated Learning (WIL) As used in this paper: an educational approach combining academic instruction with practical learning in real workplace environments, typically involving employer supervision and academic assessment. The EU policy framework uses the term "work-based learning" in VET contexts; "work-integrated learning" as applied at higher education level is not defined in EU legislation. *See also: Higher VET.*

Executive Summary

EU4DUAL Policy White Paper June 2026

Europe's higher education faces a structural misalignment between the competences its graduates acquire and those that employers, particularly in strategic industrial sectors, require. The Draghi Report (2024) identifies this skills gap as a binding constraint on European productivity and innovation capacity. Dual higher education, higher education programmes integrating sustained academic study with structured workplace learning, offers a proven mechanism for closing this gap, yet its deployment across Europe remains fragmented.

Three concurrent EU policy developments make the moment for action pressing. The Union of Skills, launched in March 2025, identifies structured work-integrated learning as a priority pathway for closing the gap between graduate competences and employer demand. The European Degree Label, due for rollout from mid-2026 under the Council resolution of 12 May 2025, will for the first time provide a quality framework for joint transnational programmes, but while its European-dimension criteria (Dimension B.2) recognise employability and learning beyond academia, they do not yet set specific standards for programmes built around substantial, assessed workplace learning. The next Erasmus+ programme cycle, currently under preparation for the post-2027 period, offers an opportunity to embed dual higher education mobility within programme rules from the outset rather than retrofitting it.

Since its establishment in 2023, the EU4DUAL Alliance — nine professional higher education institutions across nine countries, with a combined student body of 74,420 and working with over 18,000 business stakeholders and 31 associated partners across industry, government, and European networks through the EUDUAL University Association AISBL, has operated as a policy laboratory for European dual higher education. The alliance developed and is now piloting a Dual Higher Education Framework covering seven dimensions of programme design, advanced four joint dual master's programmes towards alignment with European Degree Label criteria, created a peer-reviewed DHE Quality Label for dual provision, and undertaken pilot activity in cross-border work placements, including exploratory action related to transnational apprenticeship mobility.

The alliance's first operational phase (2023–2026) focused on institution-building: establishing the legal entity, governance arrangements, and the tools needed to support cross-border dual education. The second phase (2027–2028) is expected to place greater emphasis on consolidation, implementation, and wider delivery.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations below draw on evidence from the alliance's implementation to date, structured stakeholder consultation across four governance councils, and analysis of relevant EU policy frameworks. They are organised by governance level. The accompanying Policy Brief presents the eight recommendations addressed to EU and national/regional actors; this white paper includes the complete twelve-recommendation set.

EU LEVEL

Recommendation 1 — Establish a European Reference Framework for Dual Higher Education

The alliance invites the Commission to recognise the EU4DUAL DHE Framework, including its ongoing development (*see Recommendation 9*), developed through comparative analysis across nine national systems and currently being piloted through the alliance's joint dual master's programmes, as the **reference blueprint for a European Reference Framework for Dual Higher Education, to be established through a non-binding Council Recommendation following the precedent of the 2022 Recommendation on micro-credentials**. Such a framework would enable other European University alliances and institutions operating dual provision to adopt common minimum definitional criteria on a voluntary basis, with mutual recognition and comparability of dual provision across Member States developing as a longer-term outcome

of adoption. This work should be developed in explicit dialogue with EU VET policy frameworks, including the Osnabrück Declaration and Cedefop's work on apprenticeship quality, so that existing national VET authorisation and training responsibility infrastructure is recognised as a foundation rather than treated as a parallel track.

Recommendation 2 — Clarify and Reduce Regulatory Obstacles to Cross-Border Work-Based Learning

The Commission, in coordination with Member States, is invited to clarify (not to newly regulate) how existing rules apply to cross-border work-based learning placements in dual higher education, addressing inconsistent social security coordination under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004, unresolved liability and insurance gaps, and divergent national legal classifications of dual learners during placement periods.

Recommendation 3 — Align Erasmus+ Programme Rules with Dual Mobility Requirements

The Commission is invited to adjust Erasmus+ mobility rules to accommodate the specific operational requirements of dual higher education. Current rules are designed primarily for academic exchange and do not adequately address structured work-placement calendars, the higher coordination costs of tripartite placements (student, institution, and employer), or the longer lead times required for securing supervised workplace positions in another Member State.

Recommendation 4 — Strengthen the European Degree Label Criteria for Programmes with Substantial Work-Integrated Learning.

The Commission (DG EAC) is invited to build on the Label's existing employability and learning-beyond-academia criterion (Dimension B.2) to set specific standards for joint dual programmes with substantial, assessed workplace learning — using the EU4Dual DHE Framework as a reference — so that such programmes can be recognised within the EU-level quality framework without ambiguity over how industry co-certification is treated.

Recommendation 5 — Establish a Dedicated Data Monitoring System for Dual Higher Education

The alliance calls upon the European Commission (DG EAC) to support the development of the EU4DUAL Observatory on Dual Higher Education as a European-level data resource, and to explore, within the framework of the European Universities initiative's impact monitoring architecture, mechanisms for integrating Observatory outputs into Commission monitoring of work-integrated learning provision across the initiative. The alliance further invites Cedefop and the European Training Foundation to consider collaborative data-sharing arrangements with the Observatory given their respective mandates on skills and VET monitoring.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

Recommendation 6 — Establish or Strengthen National Legal Frameworks for Dual Higher Education

Member States are called upon to establish or strengthen national legal frameworks for dual higher education, addressing as an integrated set: the legal status of dual students during workplace periods, employer obligations towards dual learners, accreditation criteria for dual programmes, and student financial support arrangements.

(This recommendation is paired with Recommendation 1 at EU level: a European reference framework requires corresponding national legislative provisions, and the Erasmus+ programme rule adjustments set out in Recommendation 3 depend on national accreditation systems being equipped to handle dual mobility.)

Recommendation 7 — Align National and Regional Funding Instruments with Dual Higher Education Requirements

Member States and regional authorities are called upon to align national and regional funding instruments with the higher unit costs of dual programme delivery, including employer liaison, placement coordination, and quality assurance of workplace learning. This includes the use of EU structural funds (ESF+ and ERDF) where applicable.

Recommendation 8 — Embed Dual Higher Education in Regional Smart Specialisation and Innovation Ecosystem Strategies

Regional authorities are called upon to integrate dual higher education into Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3/S4) priorities and regional innovation ecosystem planning. This includes aligning Knowledge Valorisation Hub themes with regional economic priorities and ensuring that dual higher education institutions are recognised as strategic partners in regional skills development and technology transfer.

ALLIANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Recommendation 9 — Consolidate and Extend the EU4DUAL DHE Framework as a European Quality Standard

The alliance commits to developing a DHE Quality Label operationalising the Framework's seven criteria as a certification scheme accessible to institutions beyond EU4DUAL membership. The Label certifies the dual features of a programme, specifically, whether it meets the structural criteria for work-integrated higher education as **defined by the DHE Framework. It is not a substitute for**, and operates entirely separately from, national accreditation and the external quality assurance processes carried out by ENQA/EQAR-registered agencies under the European Standards and Guidelines. A Label-bearing programme must hold the relevant national accreditation or programme approval applicable in its jurisdiction. The two instruments have distinct and non-overlapping scopes.

The alliance further commits to ensuring that structured student participation is embedded within the DHE Quality Label certification process, in line with the principle of student involvement in quality assurance established under the European Standards and Guidelines.

Recommendation 10 — Scale the Knowledge Valorisation Hub Model as a Mechanism for Industry-Embedded Dual Research

The alliance commits to establishing Knowledge Valorisation Hubs — six confirmed for the initial 2027–2028 phase, with scope for expansion — on the timeline set out in the 2026–2028 application, including confirmed governance arrangements with industry co-anchors, verified co-funding commitments, and alignment with regional Smart Specialisation priorities. The alliance further invites associated industry partners, regional authorities, and research funding bodies to formalise their engagement with the Hub governance structures, and invites other European University alliances to consider the Hub model as a transferable mechanism for industry-embedded dual research.

Recommendation 11 — Strengthen Equity, Inclusion, and Learner Support Frameworks for Dual Higher Education

The alliance commits to developing and adopting a common minimum standard for dual student support across all member institutions, covering financial support arrangements, academic pastoral care adapted to the dual context, workplace accommodation procedures for students with disabilities, and mentoring frameworks for students from underrepresented groups¹

The alliance further commits to integrating inclusion indicators within the Observatory's monitoring framework, against which member institutions will report annually, and to engaging national and regional authorities on the recognition of dual student financial support within national student support frameworks,

¹ Including first-generation higher education students, students from low-income households, and mature students.

including through the development of common voluntary data collection standards for equity and inclusion indicators.

Recommendation 12 — Develop Sustainable Revenue and Governance Models for Dual Higher Education Beyond the Grant Cycle

The alliance commits to completing the operational transfer to the EUDUAL AISBL on the timeline set out in the governance documentation, activating three identified revenue streams, DHE Quality Label certification, Centre of Excellence services, and Knowledge Valorisation Hub industry co-funding — before the end of the current grant period, and establishing a financial reserves target sufficient to sustain core functions across a defined transition period, as specified in the AISBL Business Plan. The alliance further commits to formalising membership contribution arrangements with member institutions under the AISBL statutes, and to actively advocating, through its engagement with EU-level policy processes, for mechanisms that support the institutional continuity of legally established European University alliance entities within the Investment Pathway for European Universities alliances currently under development for the 2028–2034 financial programming period.

EU4DUAL Alliance: Key Figures 2023–2026

Selected indicators for the Executive Summary

Figure	Description
2,241	Degree students enrolled in dual programmes across the alliance
340	Micro-credentials available in the EU4DUAL catalogue
2	Accredited Joint Dual Master's programmes, with two further in development
968	Students with international mobility experience (2023–2026, all modalities)
44	Collaborative research project applications submitted across partner institutions
1,070+	Cumulative participants across three Annual Conferences (2024, 2025, 2026)
4 EFQM	Stars for Excellence — awarded at alliance level
13	Rectors' Council meetings held since inception; 10-year joint strategy endorsed unanimously

Sources: Aurrekoetxea Narvarte (2026), pre-conference stakeholders meeting, April 2026; EU4DUAL Quantitative Evidence Data Collection Template (WP7/MCAST, March 2026); D1.4 Annual Congress (2) — 2025 Conference Report; EU4DUAL 2026–2028 Application (Proposal ID 101331065). Full evidence references in Chapter 2.



Chapter 1: Policy Context in Dual Education

1.1 Why Dual Higher Education Matters Now

Europe has long positioned higher education as a cornerstone of its social model and economic resilience. Yet as the demands of industrial transformation intensify, a structural question has moved to the centre of policy debate: whether existing higher education models are sufficiently configured to deliver the competences that green and digital transitions, demographic pressures, and competitive pressures now require. The answer, increasingly, points to a gap, not a failure of ambition, but a misalignment between what higher education systems produce and what industrial transformation demands. That gap is widening at precisely the moment when the cost of inaction is highest.

The Draghi Report (2024) framed this with clarity: Europe's competitiveness deficit is not primarily a financing problem. It is a productivity, innovation, and dependency problem. European industries particularly in automotive, aerospace, energy, and advanced manufacturing are struggling to absorb and apply knowledge at the pace that technological change demands. Skills shortages are accelerating this: demographic pressures are shrinking the working-age population while green and digital transitions are simultaneously rendering existing competence profiles obsolete. The Union of Skills (2025) estimates that mismatches between graduate profiles and labour market needs represent one of the most significant structural barriers to European competitiveness in the decade ahead.

Dual higher education addresses this directly. By structurally integrating academic learning with curriculum-aligned workplace learning², delivered across two defined learning environments and co-supervised by academic and workplace mentors, dual education bridges the distance between knowledge and industrial application. Students in dual programmes do not rotate between two parallel worlds they develop competences within real working environments, co-supervised by academic and industry mentors, contributing to live organisational challenges from the outset. This is not a pedagogical preference. It is an architecture for producing graduates who are work-ready, adaptable, and capable of implementing technological change from day one of employment.

Dual education is not a new proposition. Across the Member States that have embedded it at scale, in varying national forms and under different regulatory frameworks, it has been producing work-ready graduates and strengthening HEI-employer ties for decades, with consistently strong graduate employment and retention outcomes.

The green and digital transitions sharpen the case further. Both require not only new technical skills but the capacity to apply them in dynamic, multidisciplinary environments. Curricula co-designed with employers, a core feature of the EU4DUAL Dual Higher Education (DHE) Framework, ensure that what students learn reflects what industries actually need, including the emerging competencies in industrial hydrogen, advanced materials, AI-driven processes, and health technologies that no single institution could map alone. The Competitiveness Compass (2025) supports this idea by connecting talent development directly to Europe's ability to control its own technology: how well Europe can lessen its reliance on outside sources in important areas partly depends on whether European universities can provide the skilled workers needed to create and manage these technologies.

² In the EU4DUAL DHE Framework, the workplace constitutes a second structured learning environment (World of Work), with curriculum-defined learning outcomes and formal assessment. Partner institutions implement this through varying contractual and organisational models in accordance with national regulation.

Yet dual higher education has not scaled to match the urgency of the moment. Provision remains fragmented across Member States, quality standards are inconsistent, and employer engagement is often consultative rather than structural. Where dual models do exist at higher education level, they are frequently confined to single institutions or national systems, limiting their contribution to the cross-border talent circulation and knowledge exchange that the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Pact for Skills were designed to enable. This white paper proceeds from the premise that policy can change this but only if it is specific, evidence-grounded, and aligned with the operational realities of institutions, employers, and regional ecosystems.

The following section, 1.2, examines the EU policy framework currently shaping dual higher education, identifying where existing instruments offer genuine leverage and where gaps remain that targeted action could address.

1.2 The EU Policy Framework shaping Dual Education

This section examines the principal EU policy instruments shaping dual higher education. The analysis identifies, for each instrument, the reference to work-based learning at EQF 6–8, the enabling dimension for dual provision, and the opportunity for further policy development.

The European Union has undergone substantial changes. Since 2022 creating a stronger link between education, training, and the world of work or the labour market, this paper examines these important EU frameworks shaping education and explores if dual higher education at European level.

This is a table 1.1 which summarises all the EU frameworks that will be examined in this policy chapter.

Instrument	Type and policy domain	Reference to work-based learning at EQF 6–8	Enabling dimension for dual HE	Opportunity for further policy development for dual education
Competitiveness Compass January 2025	Commission Communication COM(2025) 30 Industrial/ economic strategy	Indirect — calls for university-business collaboration and skills for strategic sectors; does not specify delivery mode	Strategic rationale: positions skills and university-industry links as competitiveness enablers	Further specification of how education models contribute to knowledge-to-application pathways, including through structured university-industry integration
Union of Skills March 2025	Commission Communication COM(2025) 90 Education, training, employment	Limited — work-based learning referenced primarily in VET context (sub-degree); European Universities alliances mentioned as delivery mechanism	Operational framework: four-strand structure (skills for jobs, upskilling/reskilling, skills circulation, talent attraction) directly applicable	The four-strand framework could be extended to EQF 6–8 provision that integrates academic and workplace learning
European Degree Label March 2024 / May 2025	Council Resolution (May 2025); based on Commission Communication COM(2024) 144 (March 2024) Higher education, recognition	Partial — Dimension B.2 ('learning beyond academia and employability') recognises work experience, internships, industry projects, and recurring roles for professionals as European-dimension	Recognition instrument: provides pathway for transnational credentialing of joint programmes	Label criteria could be strengthened by incorporating standards for programmes with structured workplace learning components

		features, but the criteria set no specific standards for programmes built around substantial, assessed workplace learning (e.g. ECTS thresholds, employer co-certification, workplace quality assurance).		
Council Recommendation on Micro-Credentials June 2022	Council Recommendation 2022/C 243/02 Lifelong learning, employability	Indirect — enables shorter credentials from diverse providers, including employers, but provides no guidance on validating practice learning within a micro-credential structure, or on stacking credentials into degree programmes.	Credential flexibility: framework for stackable, industry-co-designed short credentials	Cross-border automatic recognition of micro-credentials co-designed with industry partners remains to be operationalised, particularly where those credentials include a validated practice learning component — a gap the Commission's current micro-credentials framework does not yet address, and which the Herning Declaration's call for work-integrated pathways at EQF 6–8 makes increasingly pressing
EEA / ERA / EHEA (Bologna Process) Ongoing (EEA since 2017; ERA renewed 2022; EHEA since 1999)	Multiple instruments; ongoing governance frameworks Education, research, higher education cooperation	Partial — Bologna tools can be applied to work-integrated provision, and institutions within EU4DUAL have done so, but the framework provides no specific guidance on quality-assuring workplace learning environments or attributing ECTS to supervised practice.	Institutional architecture: provides structural tools (ECTS, QF, QA) and hosts European Universities initiative	Bologna tools (ECTS, ESG) have been applied to work-integrated provision within EU4DUAL, demonstrating their adaptability — but standardised guidance at European level remains absent
Smart Specialisation (S4+) Ongoing (S4+ evolution from 2020)	Enabling condition for Cohesion Policy (ERDF/ESF+); JRC framework Regional innovation, cohesion policy	Partial — universities are positioned primarily as research and knowledge-transfer actors; industry-embedded education, which can itself generate knowledge transfer and lay the ground for joint research, is not recognised as a distinct S4+ contribution.	Regional anchoring: connects universities to innovation ecosystems; provides funding architecture (ERDF, ESF+) for workforce development	Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes would benefit from recognising industry-embedded education as a knowledge-transfer and research-generative activity, not only a workforce development pipeline.

CSRD	Directive 2022/2464; Omnibus I simplification adopted December 2025 March 2026 (Omnibus) Corporate sustainability reporting	Not applicable — Directive applies to large companies, not to universities or educational alliances	Accountability principle: establishes standardised impact reporting logic adaptable to education contexts	Impact reporting principles developed in corporate contexts can be adapted voluntarily to higher education settings
Herning Declaration September 2025	Ministerial Declaration (Copenhagen Process) VET policy	Explicit — calls for higher-level VET pathways at EQF 6–8, parity of esteem with academic education, apprenticeship mobility, employers as co-educators	VET-HE convergence: legitimises work-integrated learning at tertiary level; feeds into upcoming EU VET strategy	A coordinated quality assurance approach across the Copenhagen and Bologna processes is needed for work-integrated provision at EQF 6–8

The analysis of the policy frameworks is organised around four thematic areas that reflect how the instruments relate to dual higher education.

- The first, **skills and competitiveness**, examines the overarching strategic frameworks, the Competitiveness Compass and the Union of Skills, that position human capital and university-industry collaboration as drivers of European competitiveness.
- The second, **recognition, quality assurance, and credentials**, addresses the instruments governing how qualifications and shorter credentials are recognised and quality-assured across borders, including the European degree label, the micro-credentials framework, and the Bologna tools.
- The third, **the convergence of VET and higher education**, considers the Herning Declaration and Smart Specialisation (S4+) as instruments that increasingly bridge vocational and academic traditions at EQF 6–8.
- The fourth, **sustainability and accountability**, examines the CSRD and the emerging principle of institutional impact reporting. A concluding synthesis draws together the cross-cutting patterns across all eight instruments.

1.2.1 Thematic Theme 1: Skills and Competitiveness Policy Instruments in Dual Education

The Competitiveness Compass identifies three imperatives: closing the innovation gap, decarbonisation, and reducing strategic dependencies. Human capital is positioned as a foundation for each, and the Compass calls for enhanced collaboration between higher education institutions, research departments, and business including through strengthened European Universities alliances.

The Union of Skills operationalises this strategic direction for education and skills policy. It organises action around four strands: building skills for quality jobs, upskilling and reskilling for the digital and green transitions, circulating skills across the EU and attracting and retaining talent and introduces new governance instruments: a European Skills Intelligence Observatory, a European Skills High-Level Board, and a proposed EU-27 Recommendation integrating education and skills priorities into the European Semester.

Both EU frameworks emphasise university-business partnerships, transnational cooperation, and sector-specific skills development in strategic areas including digital technologies, green industry, advanced manufacturing, and health. The four-strand structure of the Union of Skills aligns directly with the objectives of dual higher education: co-designed curricula address skills for quality jobs; work-integrated learning in green and digital sectors delivers upskilling through industrial application; structured transnational work placements embed skills circulation in labour markets; and clear career pathways from dual programmes to industrial doctorates support talent retention.

The Herning Declaration's call for higher-level VET pathways at EQF 6–8, endorsed in September 2025, signals that the boundary between vocational and academic provision at the tertiary level is under active policy review. The forthcoming EU VET strategy, announced under the Union of Skills and informed by a call for evidence that closed in February 2026, is the vehicle through which this may be taken forward, but its scope and instruments remain to be determined, with publication expected later in 2026. In the interim, a structural gap persists: work-integrated learning at EQF 6–8 is not adequately addressed by either the instruments governing higher education or those governing VET. Higher education instruments are designed around academic programme structures and set no specific standards for employer co-delivery, workplace quality assurance, or the credit recognition of workplace learning. The European Degree Label recognises employability and learning beyond academia among its European-dimension criteria (Dimension B.2) but sets no requirements specific to programmes built around substantial, assessed workplace learning; Erasmus+ mobility rules are calibrated to academic exchange rather than tripartite placement models; and the European Standards and Guidelines address academic quality assurance but not the quality of employer engagement in programme governance. VET instruments address work-based learning in depth but are scoped either below the higher education threshold or have yet to be extended to EQF 6–8 in a form that engages with the Bologna and EHEA architecture.

Dual higher education sits within this gap as a branch of higher education, not as a separate category between VET and academic provision. Its distinguishing feature is the structural integration of supervised workplace learning as a credited, quality-assured component of a degree programme, a feature that existing HE instruments do not yet accommodate consistently across Member States. The policy need is not a parallel regulatory track or a dedicated mobility benchmark, but the extension and clarification of existing higher education instruments so that work-integrated provision within HE is fully recognised within their scope. This direction is consistent with, and supported by, a body of existing EU policy commitments: the Council Recommendation on Quality Apprenticeships (2018) established quality criteria for work-based learning explicitly applicable across education levels including EQF 6–8; the European Skills Agenda (2020) positioned work-based learning as a priority across all education levels; and the Pact for Skills established the principle of employer co-investment in workforce development as a structural feature of the European skills landscape. Extending this policy logic to the specific conditions of dual higher education means ensuring that Erasmus+ eligibility rules cover structured work placements forming part of a dual degree; that European Degree Label criteria accommodate programmes with employer co-delivery; and that quality assurance frameworks do not treat credited workplace learning as an anomaly requiring special dispensation. The recommendations in Chapter 3 address each of these gaps within the framework of existing HE instruments.

1.2.2 Thematic Theme 2: Recognition, quality assurance, and credentials policy instruments related to dual education

A parallel set of EU instruments addresses the mechanisms through which qualifications, learning outcomes, and shorter credentials are recognised and quality-assured across the EU.

The European degree label provides a framework for joint programmes delivered by alliances across multiple countries to receive a criteria-based, transnational label. The Council adopted a resolution in May 2025 establishing a three-phase approach: finalisation of criteria by mid-2027, rollout and feasibility evaluation during 2027–2028, and a subsequent decision on a possible full European degree. The label criteria

emphasise joint governance, transnational delivery, and integrated quality assurance. It features inherent to alliance-level joint programmes. Extending the label criteria to incorporate standards for programmes with structured workplace learning components including employer-supervised assessment and cross-border work placement quality would strengthen the label's relevance to the growing number of joint programmes that integrate academic and professional learning.

Lifelong learning is not a peripheral concern for dual higher education, it is structurally embedded in its model. The integration of workplace learning into degree programmes creates direct institutional links between HEIs and employers that extend beyond initial qualification. These links provide the infrastructure for upskilling, reskilling, and continuing professional development as industries adapt to digital and green transitions. Several EU instruments recognise this potential: the Union of Skills explicitly positions upskilling and reskilling as a core strand; the European Skills Agenda identified work-based learning as a vehicle for lifelong skills development; and the Pact for Skills established employer co-investment in workforce development as a structural principle. For dual higher education, the challenge is to ensure that recognition instruments, for qualifications, shorter credentials, and prior learning, are sufficiently flexible and interoperable to support learning across a working lifetime, not only at the point of initial degree completion.

The Council Recommendation on micro-credentials established a common European definition, standard elements, and principles for the design and recognition of shorter learning experiences. This instrument is directly relevant to dual higher education, which operates increasingly through combinations of full degree programmes and shorter, industry-driven credentials in stackable pathways. However, the recognition challenge extends beyond micro-credentials specifically. Continuing professional development, industry-led training, structured retraining programmes, and prior professional learning acquired outside formal education all represent forms of learning that current European recognition instruments address unevenly or not at all. Implementation of the micro-credentials framework has advanced unevenly: a 2025 progress report indicates that many Member States are still developing national quality assurance procedures. The further development needed is a broader approach to recognising non-traditional and shorter forms of learning — including but not limited to micro-credentials, that enables learning acquired in professional contexts to be recognised, stacked, and built upon across borders and across a working lifetime.

The European Education Area, the European Research Area, and the European Higher Education Area provide the broader institutional architecture.¹⁰ The EEA hosts the European Universities initiative and supports mutual recognition reforms. The ERA focuses on research coordination, open science, and researcher careers. The EHEA, governed through the Bologna Process, provides the structural tools (ECTS, the Qualifications Framework, the Diploma Supplement, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)) upon which cross-border higher education cooperation depends. The Union of Skills Communication signals that EEA governance will be integrated into the Union of Skills architecture, potentially strengthening coordination between education and employment policy.

Dual higher education spans the intersections between these three areas. It is simultaneously education, research, and labour-market oriented.

The further development that would benefit this provision is the consistent and correct application of Bologna tools to work-integrated learning. **ECTS** was designed around learning outcomes rather than learning location, and the Bologna Process was developed in a context where high-quality programmes already incorporated practical, applied, and work-based learning. However, national implementation has frequently merged ECTS with purely academic workload, with the result that workplace learning is inconsistently credited across Member States, not because the framework excludes it, but because institutional practice has not always applied it correctly. **The further development needed is not a revision of ECTS but authoritative clarification, at European level, that learning outcomes acquired in employer-supervised settings are fully creditable within the existing Bologna architecture.** Two further tools require attention in the same spirit: the ESG assess institutional and academic quality processes but do not currently address the quality of employer engagement in programme governance; and the Diploma Supplement describes

academic attainment but provides no mechanism for recording competences acquired through sustained professional experience. Extending the application of these tools to work-integrated provision at EQF 6–8 would benefit not only dual higher education but any programme seeking to integrate academic and professional learning across borders.³

1.2.3 Thematic Theme 3: The Convergence of VET and higher education in EU policy instruments

The relationship between vocational education and training and higher education has never been uniform across Europe. Several Member States, particularly in northern and central Europe, have established professional bachelor's and master's pathways, recognition of prior learning instruments, and institutional bridges between VET and higher education over decades. Others retain sharper institutional divides, where applied and informal learning is excluded from degree programmes and traditional academic norms constrain what counts as creditable higher education activity. The policy challenge is not the existence of a single European divide to be overcome, but the unevenness of how national systems have addressed the intersection of vocational and academic provision, an unevenness that creates structural asymmetries for cross-border dual higher education provision and for the mutual recognition of work-integrated credentials. Two EU instruments bear directly on this uneven landscape and signal that convergence, where it has not yet occurred, is now an explicit policy objective.

The Herning Declaration on Attractive and Inclusive Vocational Education and Training for Increased Competitiveness and Quality Jobs 2026–2030, endorsed in September 2025, establishes 13 objectives for the next five-year cycle. Three are directly relevant. First, the Declaration addresses parity of esteem between VET and academic education, recognising that the perceived hierarchy between pathways constrains both talent supply and social equity. Second, it calls for expansion of higher-level VET pathways at EQF 6–8 — referred to in this paper as Higher VET (see Glossary), acknowledging that vocational learning need not be confined to sub-degree levels. Third, it promotes apprenticeship mobility and the role of employers as co-educators. These are principles that extend naturally to higher education structured around work-integrated learning. The Declaration also calls for an ambitious new VET strategy under the Union of Skills, for which the Commission launched a call for evidence in January 2026.

The Declaration's significance lies in its acknowledgement that vocational and academic education converge at EQF 6–8 and that quality assurance at this level must align with higher education standards if parity of esteem is to move from aspiration to practice. Dual higher education sits precisely at this point, delivered by universities or universities of applied sciences, leading to bachelor's, master's, or doctoral qualifications that employ pedagogies characteristic of VET, including work-based learning, employer co-design, and structured alternation between academic and workplace settings. This is the key distinction from Higher VET (see Glossary): dual higher education programmes are Bologna-recognised degrees from the outset, whereas Higher VET qualifications' relationship to the HE degree architecture is determined nationally. The further development needed is a coordinated quality assurance approach across the Copenhagen and Bologna processes for work-integrated provision at EQF 6–8, ensuring that programmes operating at this intersection are supported by a coherent framework rather than falling between two governance traditions.

The Smart Specialisation framework (S4+) adds a regional dimension.¹⁴ Smart Specialisation Strategies for Sustainability require regions to identify competitive advantages through Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes involving multi-stakeholder partnerships. Universities feature in this framework primarily as research and knowledge-transfer actors. The human capital dimension is the pipeline of graduates and professionals with

³ The EU4DUAL DHE Framework 1.0 operationalises a workload model that separately recognises and credits practical learning as a distinct component alongside academic learning, providing a working reference for how ECTS could be adapted to capture workplace learning. See: EU4DUAL Centre of Excellence on Dual Higher Education (2024). DHE Framework 1.0. ERASMUS-EDU-2022-EUR-UNIV, Grant Agreement No. 101089937.

competences aligned to regional industrial specialisations. It is integral to any smart specialisation strategy but is not yet connected to the specific institutional model of dual higher education, in which employer partnerships are structurally embedded in programme governance rather than operating as ad hoc arrangements. Strengthening the link between Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes and industry-embedded education would reinforce the workforce dimension of regional innovation strategies.

1.2.4 Thematic Theme 4: Sustainability and accountability related to EU instruments for dual education

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive requires large companies to report on environmental, social, and governance impacts using European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). Omnibus I simplification package (Directive (EU) 2026/470), provisionally agreed in December 2025 and entering into force on 18 March 2026⁴, narrowed its scope to companies with over 1,000 employees and €450 million turnover while reducing mandatory data points.

The **CSRD** does not apply to universities or educational alliances. Its relevance to dual higher education is indirect but instructive. The directive has established the principle that organisations should demonstrate accountability for social and environmental impact in a standardised, comparable manner, a principle increasingly relevant to publicly funded education institutions facing demands for evidence of societal contribution beyond academic outputs. While **no sustainability reporting framework currently exists for higher education**, impact reporting principles developed in corporate contexts can be adapted to education settings. The voluntary adoption of Triple Bottom Line reporting, assessing environmental, social, and economic sustainability by educational alliances, represents an early step in this direction and one that could inform the development of broader accountability frameworks for publicly funded research-education institutions.

1.3 Dual Education EU Policy Synthesis: The current position of dual higher education within the EU framework

Across the eight policy frameworks examined in this section, a consistent pattern emerges. Each framework addresses one or more dimensions of what dual higher education entails: skills development, cross-border recognition, industry partnership, regional anchoring, lifelong learning, sustainability. Each provides enabling conditions that support the further development of work-integrated provision at tertiary level.

The Competitiveness Compass and the Union of Skills provide the strategic rationale, positioning skills and HEI-employer collaboration as foundations of European competitiveness. The European Degree Label and micro-credential framework offer recognition instruments for transnational and flexible credentials. The EEA, ERA, and EHEA provide the institutional architecture of structural tools, quality standards, and cooperation frameworks. The Herning Declaration opens the door to convergence between VET and higher education at EQF 6–8, legitimising work-integrated learning at tertiary level as a concern of both VET and higher education policy. S4+ connects higher education institutions to regional innovation ecosystems through multi-stakeholder governance and cohesion funding. The CSRD signals a shift towards institutional accountability for measurable societal impact.

The opportunity lies in connecting these instruments to the specific conditions under which dual higher education operates. Quality assurance of workplace learning at tertiary level currently falls between the ESG and VET quality frameworks. Cross-border work placement mobility falls between Erasmus+ and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. The recognition of competences acquired through employer-supervised experience in another country falls between the Bologna recognition instruments and

⁴ Directive (EU) 2026/470 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 February 2026, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 26 February 2026, entering into force 18 March 2026

the Professional Qualifications Directive. Each of these is an area where further policy development, building on existing instruments rather than creating new ones, would strengthen the conditions for work-integrated higher education across the EU.

The frameworks provide the foundations. The next step is to build the connections between them that dual higher education requires. One cross-cutting gap remains underaddressed across all eight instruments and falls outside the current recommendation set: the recognition of prior professional learning. Without robust RPL frameworks at EQF 6–8, the commitment to lifelong learning embedded in each of these instruments risks remaining an aspiration rather than a functional pathway, particularly for experienced professionals entering or progressing through dual higher education programmes. **The alliance identifies this as a priority area for policy development in subsequent iterations of this paper.**

1.4 EU4DUAL as a Policy Laboratory

Policy arguments for dual higher education are only as credible as the evidence behind them. EU4DUAL's value to this White Paper, and to the broader European policy debate, is not simply that it advocates for dual education, but that it has been implementing it, across borders, at scale, and under conditions that most national systems have not yet attempted.

Most European University alliances are organised around shared thematic interests and coordinate activities between partners within those domains. EU4DUAL is system-aligned rather than thematically aligned: the alliance exists to strengthen and advance dual higher education as a model across Europe, not only to coordinate activities among its own members. This means its instruments, including the Dual Quality Label, the Centre of Excellence, the Observatory for Dual Higher Education, and policy engagement activities, are designed to influence how dual education is defined, quality-assured, and implemented beyond the consortium itself.

The Commission's January 2025 report on the outcomes of the European Universities initiative confirms the significance of this approach. Across the 65 alliances assessed, engagement with associated partners, including businesses, public authorities, and civil society, was identified as an area where alliances have been underused in governance. EU4DUAL's strategic square model, which positions world of work partners as governance equals from the outset rather than associated partners engaged after the fact, directly addresses this structural gap, reflecting dual higher education's commitment to balancing the needs of the labour market with the broader personal and civic development of learners.

Chapter 2: Evidence-Based Learning from the EU4DUAL Alliance

Introduction

This chapter sets out what the EU4DUAL alliance has learned over four years of implementation (2023–2026), how this learning was generated, and what the evidence implies for the policy recommendations presented in Chapter 3. The chapter moves from findings to implications so that the reasoning behind each recommendation can be clearly traced to its evidence base.

The 2024 White Paper articulated a vision. The 2025 edition consolidated stakeholder feedback from the Malta and Bidart annual conferences. This 2026 edition draws on a wider and more structured evidence base, including implementation data from work packages, quality assurance processes, the Teachers and Researchers Network Taskforce practitioner consultation, organisational excellence assessment, and the alliance's own experience of institutional redesign, to produce actionable policy guidance grounded in what has actually been tested.

Three principles govern this chapter. First, the chapter distinguishes between what is established and what remains to be demonstrated, acknowledging evidence gaps openly rather than obscuring them. Second, it treats evidence from what did not work as expected with the same analytical weight as evidence from successes; in a policy laboratory, findings that reveal structural constraints are as valuable as those that confirm effective approaches. Third, it connects each finding to a level of governance at which action is required, because evidence without a clear addressee is evidence without policy utility.

This chapter is organised around **six domains** that reflect the alliance's consolidated operational structure for the 2027–2028 work programme. This structure was chosen because these domains map directly onto the governance committees, operational teams, and external partnerships that generate evidence, making traceability between findings and subsequent recommendations clearer. Each domain concludes with a policy implication that bridges to the corresponding recommendations in Chapter 3.

The six evidence domains

2.1 Governance, Quality, and Sustainability: institutional framework, quality assurance, financial sustainability, and legal structures

2.2 Centre of Excellence: the Observatory, Leadership Academy, scientific journal, and the DHE Quality Label

2.3 Joint Programmes and Credentials: joint dual master's programmes, micro-credentials, the DHE Framework, and recognition

2.4 Research and Innovation: Knowledge Valorisation Hubs, industrial PhDs, the Grand Challenges transition, and entrepreneurship

2.5 Mobility and Cross-Border Work-Based Learning: the iDual mobility portfolio, transnational apprenticeship mobility, and regulatory barriers

2.6 Stakeholder Engagement and Regional Impact: industry engagement, the Student Council, regional governance, and Smart Specialisation alignment

Section 2.7 presents the cross-cutting findings from the **Teachers and Researchers Network Taskforce** practitioner consultation, conducted across partner institutions in early 2026.

EU4DUAL Alliance: Key Figures 2023–2026

Full reference table — Chapter 2

Figure	Indicator	Chapter 2
Governance and Institutional Structure		
10	Higher Education Institutions across 9 EU Member States	2.1
42	Campuses across the alliance network	2.1
13	Rectors' Council meetings held since inception (most recent: June 2026)	2.1
9	Thematic governance committees operational across the alliance	2.1
4 EFQM	Stars for Excellence — awarded at alliance level	2.1
268	Teachers and researchers connected through the internal social network	2.1
Education and Credentials		
2	Accredited Joint Dual Master's programmes (+ 2 in development)	2.3
340	Micro-credentials available in the catalogue	2.3
5	Learning pathways	2.3
2,241	Degree students enrolled in dual programmes	2.3
1,327	Lifelong learners enrolled in micro-credentials	2.3
2	Peer-reviewed journals focused on Dual Higher Education	2.2
6	Articles published in ESJ DHE Issue 1 (2024)	2.2
Research and Innovation		
3	Grand Challenge themes: Future of Work, Green Economy, Healthy Living	2.4
5	Grand Challenge Forums convened since inception (most recent: June 2026)	2.4
4	Lighthouse Research Initiatives, structured into 16 research clusters	2.4
44	Collaborative research project applications submitted	2.4
6 *	Knowledge Valorisation Hubs confirmed for launch in 2027–2028	2.4
Mobility		
968	Students with international mobility experience (2023–2026, all modalities)	2.5

373	Staff members with international mobility experience (2023–2026)	2.5
346	Cumulative staff exchanges completed since 2023	2.5
61	iDual semester abroad mobilities completed (2024–2025)	2.5
~30 **	iDual work placement traineeships completed (2024–2025)	2.5
5	iDual mobility modalities operational	2.5
Stakeholder Engagement		
12	ICC member companies represented in the Industry Consultative Council	2.6
18	Student Council representatives with formal governance roles	2.6
3	Annual Conferences held (Malta 2024, Basque Country 2025, Heilbronn 2026)	2.6
1,070+	Cumulative Annual Conference participants (250 + 321 + 500+)	2.6
100%	2025 conference respondents who would attend again and recommend attendance	2.6

* Confirmed for the 2027–2028 phase (Proposal ID 101331065). Not yet operational; minimum participation requirements verified at application stage.

** Approximate figure; confirmed data pending from responsible WP. Source: KPI Report, 5 March 2026.

All other figures: Aurrekoetxea Narvarte (2026), pre-conference stakeholders meeting, April 2026; EU4DUAL Quantitative Evidence Data Collection Template (WP7/MCAST, March 2026); D1.4 Annual Congress (2) — 2025 Conference Report; EU4DUAL 2026–2028 Application (Proposal ID 101331065).

2.1 Governance, Quality, and Sustainability

The most structurally significant governance achievement of the 2023–2026 phase was the establishment of the EUDUAL University Association AISBL as a permanent legal entity. This provides the alliance with a legal and organisational framework that enables coordination beyond project cycles and ensures continuity of strategic implementation.

The AISBL is the first permanent legal structure dedicated exclusively to dual higher education at European level, and its establishment positions the alliance to assume operational coordination independently of Erasmus+ grant cycles.

The alliance's governance architecture is now fully operational at multiple levels: the Rectors' Council, which has convened 13 times since the alliance's inception and most recently met in June 2026, the Steering Committee, the Project Management Committee, the Central Office, and nine thematic committees spanning all operational areas.

All nine rectors endorsed the 10-year joint strategy for 2026–2036, which sets ambitious targets including 10 joint degrees under the European Degree Label, 30 or more external institutions adopting EU4DUAL standards, 50% graduate international mobility, and 80% employment within six months sustained year on year.

The alliance's institutional quality trajectory is confirmed by its achievement of 4 EFQM Stars for Excellence, a recognition awarded to organisations demonstrating sustained, evidence-based improvement across leadership, strategy, and results dimensions. This positions EU4DUAL among a small number of European higher education alliances to have undergone external excellence assessment at alliance level rather than at individual institutional level.

What implementation demonstrated

The governance structures were inclusive but generated duplication between committees and work package teams. The volume of coordination, compounded by work overload across partners and imbalances in engagement, constrained delivery. The alliance's 2027–2028 application responds to this finding by consolidating governance into a single strategic body with tighter feedback loops between decision-making and implementation, adopting an OKR (Objectives and Key Results) management framework for directing effort where it matters most, and organising partners into core teams per work package so that each institution concentrates on where it adds most value rather than spreading thinly across all activities.

At the operational level, the EU4DUAL Excellence Portal provides real-time monitoring across the alliance, and a five-level Theory of Change was documented and finalised in the 2027–2028 application, linking activities to outputs, outcomes, intermediate impacts, and long-term societal effects.

Evidence gaps

Financial sustainability beyond Erasmus+ funding remains the most consequential unresolved challenge. The alliance currently operates one revenue stream; the 2027–2028 application targets three operational revenue streams by 2028, including industry-branded micro-credentials, the DHE Quality Label offered to external institutions, and a University-Business Unit managing industry partnerships. These revenue models are proposed but not yet tested.

Policy implication: The AISBL provides the institutional vehicle for long-term sustainability, but the revenue model requires validation. The governance restructuring demonstrates institutional learning, but its effectiveness will only be measurable during the 2027–2028 cycle. This evidence supports the case for Erasmus+ programme design that accommodates the additional governance complexity of dual alliances (Recommendation 3) and for the DHE Framework as mandatory quality reference (Recommendation 1).

2.2 Centre of Excellence

The Centre of Excellence operates as the alliance's knowledge infrastructure for the dual higher education sector. It performs three functions: knowledge exchange, standard-setting, and capacity-building.

In knowledge exchange, the Centre organises research seminars across partner institutions drawing speakers from academia, industry, and policy. Research priorities include work-integrated learning pedagogies, the role of industry in programme governance and quality assurance, cross-border placement design, skills-based assessment methods, and the alignment of dual provision with green and digital transition needs. The European Journal for Dual Higher Education (EJ DHE) published its first issue in 2024. The European Scientific Journal for Dual Higher Education (ESJ DHE) is a peer-reviewed venue dedicated to dual education scholarship, currently in development. The biennial Observatory survey is designed to map dual education provision across Europe, generating a data base that does not currently exist at European level.

In standard-setting, the Centre developed and maintains the DHE Framework 1.0, the first European-level definition of dual higher education. The Framework covers seven mandatory dimensions: Policy and Strategy, Admission, Formalisation of Commitment, Teaching and Learning, Work Placement, Evaluation and Assessment, and Quality Assurance. It was developed through comparative analysis of and consensus-building between partner institutions' models across nine national systems and provides adaptable guidance rather than a single prescribed model.

In capacity-building, the Leadership Academy delivers intensive training for institutional leaders on dual education management, integrating employer and student perspectives. An online Tutor and Mentor Training Programme, structured across four micro-credential-based modules, is under development; learning content is planned for completion by end of 2026. A full Leadership Academy programme is planned for the 2026–2027 extension period.

What implementation demonstrated

The DHE Framework is the strongest evidential pilot product of the Centre. It provides an operationally verifiable reference that national authorities and accreditation bodies can adopt without requiring new instruments. Its seven mandatory criteria, including the requirement that a minimum of 20% of ECTS derive from integrated workplace learning, that ECTS are awarded for work placements, and that quality assurance covers the entire programme including practical phases, are applied in the alliance's accredited programmes, with targeted customisations for Joint Dual Masters, without altering the DHE Framework itself.

The DHE Quality Label, which is the mechanism through which the alliance's quality model becomes externally certifiable and exportable, remains at design stage. An internal pilot is planned, but no completed certification cycle exists. This distinction matters: the Label's credibility when offered to external institutions depends on the Framework being consistently applied internally first.

Policy implication: The DHE Framework provides the reference standard that existing EU instruments lack for work-integrated provision at EQF 6–8. The European Degree Label criteria, the Union of Skills national action plans, and the Bologna tools (ECTS, ESG, Diploma Supplement) all accommodate academic programmes but do not assess the quality of employer engagement in programme governance, workplace learning components, or the competences acquired through sustained professional experience. Adapting these tools to work-integrated provision would benefit not only dual higher education but any programme seeking to integrate academic and professional learning across borders (Recommendations 1, 4, and 9).

2.3 Joint Programmes and Credentials

The alliance's joint programme portfolio represents the most tangible translation of the DHE Framework into accredited, operational educational offerings.

Two joint dual master's programmes are now accredited under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: the Joint Dual Master's in Digital and Sustainable Manufacturing Engineering (90 ECTS), accredited by Unibasq and launching in autumn 2026, and the Joint Dual Master's in Green Economy and Sustainable Future (90 ECTS), also accredited by Unibasq and launching in September 2027. Both programmes were co-designed with industry partners, including DANOBAT and AVL, through the Joint Academic Coordination Board model, which gives company representatives a formal role in curriculum design, assessment criteria, and programme governance. Both meet the criteria set in the EU4Dual DHE Framework 1.0: a minimum of 20% of ECTS is gained through practical learning in the world of work, and the competences a student develops in the practical phase with the world-of-work partner are closely related to the content of the study programme.

Two further programmes are in development. The Joint Dual Master's in Healthy Living and Integrated Health in Modern Societies (90/120 ECTS) is in curriculum development, with accreditation planned with AQ Austria during 2026 and launch targeted for autumn 2027. The Joint Dual Master's in Project Management for a Digital, Interconnected and Sustainable Industry (90 ECTS) is in early development pending an Erasmus Mundus Design Measures funding decision, with launch planned for autumn 2028. These are included as a committed pipeline rather than achieved outcomes.

What implementation demonstrated

The programme design standards — a minimum of 20% of ECTS gained through practical learning in the world of work, as set in the EU4Dual DHE Framework 1.0 — is the strongest evidential standard in this domain. It is not an aspirational target: it is a Framework requirement applied in two programmes accredited through the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The accreditation processes themselves generated significant implementation evidence on cross-border regulatory barriers. Aligning assessment methods, semester schedules, examination regulations, and credit transfer across multiple national systems proved more complex than anticipated. The TRN Taskforce confirms this: practitioners report misaligned semester schedules, divergent assessment methods, and the difficulty of developing joint Study and Examination Regulations that comply with each country's legislation.

Policy implication: The accredited programme standards across two joint dual master's programmes provide a ready-made reference for embedding work-integrated learning criteria in the European Degree Label (Recommendation 4). The successful accreditation of programmes with a 20% ECTS threshold for practical learning in the world of work demonstrates that Bologna tools are sufficiently flexible to accommodate work-integrated provision at higher education level, but this was achieved through sustained institutional interpretation rather than supported European-level guidance, underscoring that replicability at scale requires the Commission to formalise what partner institutions have demonstrated in practice. The cross-border regulatory barriers encountered during accreditation provide primary evidence for the Commission review of placement mobility barriers (Recommendation 2). The micro-credential pipeline, once operational, will test whether the 2022 Council Recommendation on micro-credentials can accommodate industry-branded credentials co-created with employers.

2.4 Research and Innovation

Research and innovation within the alliance was initially organised around three Grand Challenges: Future of Work, Green Economy, and Healthy Living. These served as the primary thematic framework for cross-institutional research collaboration, identification of shared research priorities, and engagement of industry partners around common themes.

What implementation demonstrated

Four years of implementation demonstrated that the Grand Challenges were effective as strategic orientation but too broad to serve as the direct organising unit for productive cross-institutional research collaboration. Researchers assigned to the same Grand Challenge often worked on problems that were thematically adjacent but methodologically and industrially distinct. The breadth of the themes made it difficult to establish the shared focus required for co-authored outputs, joint funding applications, or structured industry co-creation. The scale of the alliance's research engagement during the 2023–2026 cycle is reflected in 44 collaborative research project applications submitted across partner institutions, documented in the presentation at the April 2026 Annual Conference pre-conference stakeholders meeting (Aurrekoetxea Narvarte, 2026). This finding is one of the most significant pieces of implementation evidence generated by the current cycle.

The TRN Taskforce confirms this structural constraint from the practitioner perspective. Practitioners report that dual programmes leave limited room for research alongside teaching and workplace commitments. Several institutions flag missing PhD opportunities in dual universities and the challenge that students cannot participate in research activities comparable to those in standard programmes. Research integration is identified as the weakest dimension of dual provision across the alliance.

In response, the 2027–2028 work programme introduces Knowledge Valorisation Hubs as the operational mechanism. Each Hub must meet five prerequisites before becoming operational: participation from at least four partner institutions; commitment of entire research groups or departments; demonstrated industry engagement through existing valorisation contracts or co-funded agreements; delivery of at least one core educational mechanism; and a thematic focus narrow enough that participants share sufficient common ground for joint work to be productive.

The research infrastructure built during 2023–2026 includes four Lighthouse Research Initiatives operational since 2023 across green business, sustainable and digital industry, health and welfare, and interdisciplinary social sciences. The Research and Innovation Challenge Prize ran its first edition in April 2025. Young Researchers Schools, five-day intensive programmes, have run since 2023 as cross-border research training instruments. A Joint Industrial PhD Programme Framework and a Resource Centre for Dual Researchers are in development but not yet operational.

Since the alliance's establishment, **five Grand Challenge Forums have been convened**, with the most recent held in June 2026. These forums bring together Work Package leaders and Grand Challenge leads across partner institutions to review progress, share findings, address priorities arising from implementation, and strengthen the working relationships that underpin cross-institutional coordination. Their function is internal: they operate as a governance and team-building mechanism within the alliance's research leadership, providing structured continuity between the annual conference and ongoing work package delivery.

Policy implication: This evidence supports the case for national funding instruments that accommodate the higher costs and interdisciplinary requirements of dual research collaboration (Recommendation 7), and for regional alignment of Smart Specialisation priorities with Knowledge Valorisation Hub themes (Recommendation 8)

2.5 Mobility and Cross-Border Work-Based Learning

The alliance operates five iDual mobility modalities, all operational: semester abroad, cross-border traineeships, Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), entrepreneurship mobility, and double degree pathways. Staff exchange has been operational since 2023, with documented examples including an Entrepreneurial Learning exchange in December 2025. Summer and winter schools have run since 2023. Young Researchers Schools serve a dual function as both research training and mobility instruments.

Quantitative data for the 2024–2025 academic year records 61 completed iDual semester abroad mobilities and approximately 30 iDual work placement traineeships. Staff exchange has generated 346 cumulative staff mobilities across the alliance since 2023. When aggregated across all modalities and the full grant period, 968 students and 373 staff members have accumulated international mobility experience within the EU4DUAL network (Aurrekoetxea Narvarte, 2026). These figures reflect the pre-scale phase of the iDual portfolio; the 2027–2028 targets set a 3x increase as the baseline.

The Internationalisation Committee, comprising representatives from all nine partner institutions' internationalisation offices, coordinates admissions, credit transfer, and language policy. The European Student Card initiative is in implementation across partner institutions.

What implementation demonstrated

The five iDual modalities demonstrate that diverse mobility formats can operate within a dual education framework. However, the transnational apprenticeship pathway, which is the most policy-significant modality because it involves students undertaking credited workplace learning in a company in another Member State, has not yet been piloted. The regulatory framework does not support it.

The barriers are specific and documented. Insurance liability across national borders remains unresolved: when a dual student undertakes a work placement in a company in another Member State, the question of who carries liability (the sending institution, the receiving company, the student, or the sending country's social security system) has no clear answer in most bilateral arrangements. Employer recognition of cross-border placement outcomes is inconsistent. Social security entitlements for students on transnational placements vary by Member State with no coordinating framework. Credit transfer for workplace learning outcomes, as distinct from academic credit transfer which Erasmus+ handles effectively, falls between existing instruments.

These barriers are not peripheral. Cross-border work placement mobility is the defining component of dual education mobility and the most significant gap between current EU mobility instruments and the skills circulation objectives of the Union of Skills. Erasmus+ frameworks support academic exchange effectively; they do not support transnational work placements.

The alliance's 2027–2028 targets include a 3x increase in mobility between partners, 25 academic and 25 non-academic mobilities per year, 20 business leader mobilities per year, 4 seasonal schools per year with 100% industry involvement, and 55% of graduates working in a European environment within 3 years by 2035.

Policy implication: The documented regulatory barriers to cross-border work placement mobility provide primary evidence for the Commission study recommended in Recommendation 2. A Council Recommendation on transnational work-based learning by 2028 would be the appropriate policy outcome. The barriers identified split between Member State jurisdiction (social security, employment law) and Commission jurisdiction (Erasmus+ programme rules, EU free movement law), requiring coordinated action at both levels (Recommendations 2 and 6).

2.6 Stakeholder Engagement and Regional Impact

The alliance's stakeholder engagement architecture comprises four formal bodies: the Industry Consultative Council (ICC), the Regional Consultative Council (RCC), the Student Council, and the Business Outreach Committee (BOC). Each generates a distinct evidence stream that informs the recommendations in Chapter 3.

Industry engagement

The alliance's stakeholder engagement infrastructure encompasses 12 individual ICC members representing 12 distinct companies across advanced manufacturing, technology, energy, and other sectors. The three Annual Conferences held since 2023 have together attracted over 1,070 participants: 250 at the First Annual Conference (Malta, 2024), 321 at the Second Annual Conference (Basque Country, 2025), and more than 500 at the Third Annual Conference (Heilbronn, April 2026). Conference attendance data and the 2025 post-conference evaluation survey confirm that all respondents (100%) would attend again and recommend attendance to colleagues (EU4DUAL Annual Conference 2025 Feedback Survey). The third conference saw the largest attendance to date, reflecting consolidation of the alliance's external profile and growing engagement beyond the nine core partner institutions.

The Industry Consultative Council (ICC) has convened four formal sessions across the alliance's operational period. Its documented outputs include a consistent finding that a single engagement model cannot serve both large industrial partners capable of Joint Academic Coordination Board membership and SMEs that need lighter, more accessible collaboration pathways. The ICC formally proposed an industry club model at its April 2025 Bidart session, structured around tiered membership with differentiated benefits, obligations, and fee structures.

The 2025 post-conference evaluation provides supplementary evidence on stakeholder engagement quality. Of the 28 survey respondents drawn from authors, regular attendees, and council members, 82.1% reported having sufficient networking opportunities, and organisational team support was rated 4 or 5 (out of 5) by 85.7% of respondents. The feedback also identified areas for improvement, including more structured roundtable preparation, dedicated poster walkthrough sessions, and stronger Student Council visibility in the conference programme — findings that directly inform the 2026 conference design and the alliance's stakeholder engagement approach for 2027–2028.

The alliance's industry engagement will be expanding substantially in the 2027–2028 application, with associated partners growing from approximately seven to 31. These include 13 industrial companies across advanced manufacturing (AVL List, Infineon, Danobat Group, CAF), technology (Dassault Systèmes, Genelec), energy (Energie Steiermark, H2GREMM), health (SOPHiA Genetics), and finance (Laboral Kutxa), as well as the European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN) at European level. Industry practitioners contribute to teaching in the alliance's accredited joint programmes, and company representatives sit on each Joint Academic Coordination Board.

Student engagement

The Student Council comprises 18 representatives with formal governance roles. The alliance's own assessment, documented in the 2027–2028 application's needs analysis, is that students were not brought along as fully as they should have been during the first phase. The Student Council's limited impact identified the need for structured capacity-building: the 2027–2028 phase provides training, dedicated resources, and funding for more frequent meetings.

Regional engagement

The Regional Consultative Council comprises 9 to 18 regional government representatives. Its mandate explicitly includes talent retention and regional economic development. Council testimony consistently identifies a gap between the skills that dual programmes develop and the regional employer networks that could absorb graduates. The 2027–2028 application responds to weak regional engagement by actively

reaching out to regions across all partner countries to build a shared theory of regional integration connecting activities to Smart Specialisation priorities and local economic development.

The expansion of associated partners to include regional government bodies (Departamento de Educación del Gobierno Vasco, Pohjois-Savon Liitto, GECT Euroregion Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarre, Stadtgemeinde Kapfenberg, Kecskemét, Unidade Local de Saúde Alto Alentejo, Rijeka Development Agency) and regional innovation and economic actors (Human.Technology Styria, Science Park Graz, Wirtschaftskammer Steiermark) significantly strengthens the regional governance and economic integration dimension.

The Sustainability and Social Impact Report 2023, produced using Triple Bottom Line and ESRS-aligned methodology, was the first such report produced by a European University alliance. While no sustainability reporting framework currently exists for higher education, the voluntary adoption of structured impact reporting represents an early step toward broader accountability frameworks for publicly funded research-education institutions.

Policy implication: The ICC's documented experience of uneven industry engagement by company size directly supports the differentiated engagement model (Recommendation 10). The RCC's testimony on the gap between programme outputs and regional absorption capacity supports the Smart Specialisation alignment recommendation (Recommendation 8). The Student Council's acknowledged limitations support the case for structured student participation in quality assurance processes (Recommendation 9). The expansion of regional government associated partners provides a concrete governance base for the recommendations addressed to Managing Authorities for ERDF and ESF+ programmes (Recommendation 7).

2.7 Practitioner Findings: Teachers and Researchers Network Taskforce

The Teachers and Researchers Network Taskforce collected practitioner input from across partner institutions in early 2026 through structured questionnaires and roundtable discussions. Responses were received from MCAST, DHBW, ESTIA, FH Joanneum, Koszalin University of Technology, Mondragon Unibertsitatea, PAR University of Applied Sciences, Savonia, and John von Neumann University. This represents the first systematic cross-institutional consultation on the practitioner experience of delivering dual higher education across the alliance.

It is worth noting that not all partner institutions submitted responses with equal depth across all sections, and the researcher sections were notably less detailed than the teaching sections across most submissions. This pattern is itself a finding: it reflects the challenge of integrating research fully into the dual education model, a gap that the alliance's 2027–2028 work programme is designed to address through the Knowledge Valorisation Hub model.

Seven cross-cutting findings emerged from the data.

Finding 1: The academic-industry balance is a live, unresolved tension

Every institution consulted identifies this challenge (MCAST; DHBW; ESTIA; FHJ; KUT; MU; PAR; Savonia; JvNU). Practitioners describe the balance between academic requirements and industry expectations as a continuous, sometimes delicate process (PAR), requiring clear delineation of roles between academy and industry (MCAST), with economic and social change influencing further development (DHBW). The most precise formulation from the consultation states that academic requirements provide foundational knowledge and basic methods, while industry expectations allow learners to capitalise on that knowledge for resolving real problems, and that both are necessary (ESTIA). In one national system, the balance is mandated by regulation: the share of ECTS for workplace learning periods must be approximately 30–40% for engineering degrees (ESTIA).

In practice, most institutions manage this balance by using industry input as a context for learning rather than as a substitute for academic goals (PAR; FHJ). Differences in expectations arise when companies focus on immediate practical outputs while courses also aim to develop analytical thinking, reflection, and transferable skills (PAR; KUT). Entrepreneurs and industry representatives should be actively involved in the design of curricula so that they can influence the competencies students acquire (KUT). The balance is also maintained by aligning industry needs with EQF-level standards, while teachers ensure academic quality and appropriate ECTS workload (Savonia).

A sharper articulation of the tension emerges from the consultation: students embedded in professional environments frequently come to perceive workplace activity as more tangible or valuable than academic coursework, which they begin to treat as secondary (MU). This “earning versus learning” dynamic – the risk that professional integration erodes rather than reinforces academic engagement – is reported across sectors and disciplines (MU; ESTIA). Institutions that manage this successfully do so through a co-design model in which industry partners define relevant learning outcomes but faculty retains full control over pedagogical methodology (MU). This structural separation of what is taught from how it is taught is presented as the key mechanism for maintaining academic integrity without limiting industry relevance (MU; ESTIA).

Policy relevance: *This finding supports the case for the DHE Framework as a mandatory quality reference (Recommendation 9) and for work-integrated learning standards in the European Degree Label (Recommendation 4). The balance requires a quality framework, not ad hoc negotiation at institutional level.*

Finding 2: Industry co-educators are structurally uneven by company size

Partner institutions report that cooperation with larger and more established companies works well, but small and medium-sized enterprises are not yet involved to the same extent (PAR; Savonia; MU). This is identified as a structural challenge related to limited SME capacity rather than a lack of institutional commitment (PAR). Institutions in regions dominated by SMEs confirm that small company size makes participation in large international projects particularly challenging due to limited resources and different time horizons between academia and smaller companies (Savonia; PAR). Securing sufficient placements for students is itself a challenge, particularly in times of weak economic conditions (KUT; FHJ).

The consultation also highlights a related structural challenge: fostering genuine co-responsibility between the university and the partner organisation (MU). True co-responsibility requires that companies share educational responsibility and maintain pedagogical consistency, not merely provide a placement (MU). This is difficult to achieve even with large, well-resourced partners. The risk of pedagogical inconsistency – where corporate mentors, who are industry experts but rarely have formal pedagogical training, become the primary guides for students without adequate preparation or monitoring – is reported as a persistent weakness in delivery (MU). Employers should also receive guidance or training on how to effectively work with students in dual education settings (KUT).

Policy relevance: *—This finding directly supports the tiered industry partnership framework committed to in Recommendation 10, which creates lower-threshold entry points for SMEs while maintaining the depth of engagement required of large industrial partners in programme co-governance roles. It also supports the case for structured mentor training as a system-level requirement; in the absence of a dedicated alliance commitment on mentor preparation, this gap should be addressed within the DHE Framework's quality assurance provisions (Recommendation 9).⁵*

Finding 3: Dual students are measurably different from non-dual students

Partner institutions consistently report that dual students demonstrate stronger soft skills, greater effective maturity, and more challenging, application-oriented engagement in the classroom (FHJ; MU; ESTIA; PAR). Company feedback confirms higher employability of dual graduates (FHJ). Students with greater exposure to practical tasks and real-world environments demonstrate higher levels of professional confidence, stronger communication with external partners, and a clearer understanding of workplace expectations (PAR; MU). One institution with 50 years of dual education experience reports a dropout rate of just over 10%, with most students hired directly by their companies (DHBW).

The evidence base for this finding strengthens with additional practitioner input. Across faculties and disciplines, institutions report employability rates approaching 95%, with a significant proportion of graduates transitioning directly into permanent roles within the organisations where they trained (MU). Practitioners describe a pattern of accelerated professional identity formation: dual students develop the norms, communication style, and self-presentation of practitioners significantly earlier than their peers in standard programmes (MU; ESTIA), and they demonstrate higher purpose-driven engagement with academic content precisely because they encounter the “why behind the theory” in their daily workplace experience (MU). By the end of their programme, dual students typically demonstrate a much higher level of industrial maturity than their non-dual peers, including deeper understanding of organisational constraints, project management realities, and teamwork dynamics (ESTIA).

⁵ A related mechanism worth exploring in the next operational phase is the use of supply-chain partnerships, in which a larger anchor firm assumes co-educational responsibility on behalf of SME suppliers that lack the capacity to fulfil dual partnership obligations independently. This model, which has precedent in some national dual VET systems, could extend meaningful DHE participation to SMEs without requiring them to meet the full obligations of direct institutional partnership. The alliance notes this as a potential design option for the tiered industry partnership framework committed to in Recommendation 10, subject to piloting and evaluation.

At the same time, practitioners note that not all students adapt equally well to less structured learning situations (PAR; MU). Some require more guidance and support, especially when first confronted with open-ended tasks or real-world problems (PAR). Students face a high risk of burnout from balancing academic rigour with professional demands – the “double burden” of managing dual identities (MU). This suggests that dual education models work best when they are accompanied by clear academic guidance and gradual progression (PAR). Where the alignment between a student’s interests and the specific project or organisation is strong, engagement and outcomes are notably superior; where alignment is weak or the intensity of professional demands overwhelms personal and academic time, engagement can deteriorate (MU).

Policy relevance: *This evidence supports the competitiveness argument in Chapter 1, but it is not yet systematically collected across the alliance. This reinforces the case for graduate tracking (Recommendation 5) and has a direct bearing on the credibility of the DHE Quality Label (Recommendation 9). The alliance’s 2027–2028 application commits to a structured baseline-setting exercise in year one, acknowledging that genuine impact measurement requires baselines that largely do not yet exist.*

Finding 4: Research integration is the weakest dimension of dual provision

Practitioners report that dual programmes leave limited room for research alongside teaching and workplace commitments (DHBW; FHJ; MCAST). Several institutions flag missing PhD opportunities in dual universities (FHJ) and the challenge that students cannot participate in research activities comparable to those in standard programmes (FHJ; DHBW). Students in dual settings are sometimes reluctant to engage in scientific research, and when research is linked to laboratory content or seminars, feedback is more positive (DHBW). The integration of companies into research activities remains extremely difficult due to financing, timing, qualification requirements, and the feasibility of producing publishable results (DHBW).

From a doctoral perspective, practitioners note that dual PhD students generally cannot develop strong theoretical contributions to science in the traditional sense, but they can propose applied contributions with strong analyses of industrial situations and well-designed experiments (ESTIA). The question of what type of research methodology corresponds to dual research, and whether it can meet the expectations of high-level academic publication⁶, remains unresolved (ESTIA; MU).

The consultation provides a richer account of the structural barriers. Three are of particular policy relevance. First, temporal misalignment: industry partners require solutions within weeks, while the cycle of academic research, peer review, and publication operates on a timescale of months to years (MU; KUT). This mismatch makes genuine joint research projects difficult to sustain. Second, the accreditation gap: applied dual research – whose output is typically a solution for an industrial or social problem rather than a theoretical contribution – is systematically undervalued by traditional academic ranking and promotion criteria (MU; FHJ). Researchers who invest in industry-integrated work frequently find this investment unrecognised or penalised. Institutional departments often do not show interest in supporting and recognising cross-border or interdisciplinary research activities (FHJ). Third, the confidentiality tension: industry partners’ legitimate need to protect intellectual property conflicts directly with the academic mandate for open science and public dissemination (MU; KUT), creating a negotiation that must be managed case by case without shared frameworks.

Practitioners identify a productive alternative to the traditional internship-to-research pipeline: positioning student thesis work (bachelor and master’s level) as an integral component of broader institutional research and transfer projects with companies, rather than as standalone academic requirements (MU; ESTIA). This approach – researching with organisations rather than on them – requires what practitioners term “research

⁶ The EU4DUAL alliance operates two publication channels serving distinct audiences. The *European Scientific Journal of Dual Higher Education (ESJDHE)* is a SCOPUS-listed journal for scientific research outputs, policy analysis at a scientific level, and evidence-based practitioner studies. The *European Journal of Dual Higher Education (EJDHE)* serves a broader practitioner audience, including HEI staff, workplace partners, students, and policymakers seeking to document settings, strategies, or applied practice. Both journals are open access.

readiness” on both sides: mutual openness to data sharing and a shared commitment to transparency about research goals (MU). Where this co-creation model is operational, it produces research outputs with immediate industrial applicability and higher student engagement with the scientific process (MU; ESTIA).

Policy relevance: *This finding confirms the rationale for the Grand Challenges to Knowledge Valorisation Hub transition described in Section 2.4, and directly supports the recommendation on dual researcher career pathways (Recommendation 9 and 10). National research funding agencies should pilot career pathways that allow researchers to maintain active industry collaborations as a recognised component of academic progression. It also identifies a structural gap in the DHE Framework 1.0, which currently embeds research within the Teaching and Learning dimension without providing a standalone dual research profile; addressing this gap is a precondition for resolving the methodological questions raised by practitioners and should be treated as a priority in the next Framework iteration.*

Finding 5: Cross-border collaboration requires specific infrastructure and incentives

Practitioners report that institutional departments often do not recognise or reward cross-border research activities (FHJ; MU). Without institutional recognition and practical support, international collaboration remains limited to a small number of highly motivated individuals (PAR; FHJ). Dedicated project office support (Savonia), career development opportunities linked to international collaboration (Savonia; FHJ), and guest professor exchanges between partners (JvNU) are identified as key incentives that would make cross-border engagement more realistic within existing time constraints.

The idea of a shared EU4DUAL research platform for researcher profiles, areas of expertise, and partner matching was generally well received (PAR; MU; KUT; JvNU; Savonia), though some practitioners expressed a preference for direct contact and face-to-face interaction (PAR) and others were sceptical that such platforms deliver meaningful support in practice (ESTIA). Staff stressed that any platform would need to be linked to concrete opportunities – such as calls for proposals, pilot projects, or thematic working groups – to become part of everyday academic practice rather than an additional administrative tool (PAR; MU).

The consultation adds a further dimension: practitioners identify seed funding for initial cross-border meetings and proof-of-concept projects as the most effective incentive for activating collaboration (MU; FHJ). The “start-up costs” of cross-border partnership – alignment of research agendas, agreement on methods, establishment of data-sharing protocols – are identified as the primary barrier, not lack of interest (MU). A partner-matching database specifically designed to serve smaller institutions and those without established international R&D networks – including organisations in social, educational, and cultural sectors that do not self-identify with traditional industrial research frameworks (MU) – is seen as particularly valuable in this respect. For institutions in countries where relocated companies hold R&D capacity in their parent country, the platform could strengthen trust and cooperation on research goals achievable locally (JvNU). Practitioners also propose extending the alliance’s mobility logic into the research domain: just as “Dual Erasmus” tracks would allow students to complete academic phases in one country and industrial phases in another, staff exchange and cross-supervised doctoral arrangements could apply the same transnational logic to research collaboration (MU; PAR).

Policy relevance: *This finding supports the case for scaling the Knowledge Valorisation Hub model as a mechanism for industry-embedded dual research (Recommendation 10) and for the Observatory on Dual Higher Education covering both industry-embedded research conducted within the KVH structures and DHE research as a scholarly field in its own right.*

Finding 6: Assessment and quality assurance of workplace learning is underdeveloped

Practitioners report that measuring student engagement in dual settings is difficult due to limited access to participation data from companies (MCAST). Communication with students during workplace periods is one of the few available measurement tools (MCAST). The consultation identifies a clear need for evaluation

frameworks where industrial tutors are active stakeholders (ESTIA), and for industry participation in assessment to ensure that student competences meet labour-market needs (Savonia).

Current practice varies significantly across institutions. Some institutions require students to deliver reports and presentations after every internship period, including task descriptions, reflections on professional development, and standardised evaluation sheets signed by both the student and the company supervisor (FHJ). Others rely primarily on subjective feedback (MCAST; ESTIA). The alliance's programme design standards (a minimum of 20% of ECTS gained through practical learning in the world of work) set a quantitative threshold, but the quality assurance of the learning that takes place within that threshold remains inconsistent.

The consultation provides evidence of more developed assessment practice in some institutions. Weighted, competency-based frameworks – in which academic results, attitudinal development, and practical application are each assigned explicit proportional weight in the final evaluation (e.g. academic results 40%, attitude 30%, application 30%) – represent a more comprehensive approach than grade-only systems (MU). Tri-party feedback loops, in which the student, the academic tutor, and the corporate mentor each contribute a structured assessment of the placement period, are reported as effective where they are in place (MU). Digital portfolios and reflective tools that require students to document specific tasks, connect workplace experience to theoretical frameworks, and set personal development commitments are also used (MU). Competence-based assessments using real-world challenges – such as high-stakes professional tasks that measure technical mastery, creativity, and time management – provide an alternative to traditional examination formats (MU). However, none of these approaches is standardised at alliance level, and the training required to implement them – for both academic staff and corporate mentors – is not systematically provided yet.

Policy relevance: *This finding supports the case for embedding work-integrated learning standards in the European Degree Label criteria (Recommendation 4) and for the DHE Framework as mandatory internal reference (Recommendation 9). The Framework's Dimension 7 (Quality) requires that practical phases are included in the quality assurance system of the HEI and linked to the European Standards and Guidelines, but consistent implementation requires structured assessment tools that currently do not exist at alliance level. The DHE Quality Label (Recommendation 9) is the alliance's primary mechanism for driving convergence in workplace learning assessment practice; without standardised assessment tools, the Label cannot credibly certify the quality of practical phases across diverse institutional contexts.*⁷

Finding 7: National regulatory divergence is a real constraint

Practitioners report that all solutions must align with each country's legal framework and that while much can be negotiated at institutional level, some aspects require institution-level adjustments before implementation becomes feasible (Savonia). Unclear and varying definitions of dual education, differences in legislation, academic traditions, higher education systems, and funding models across countries complicate joint planning (Savonia; KUT). Several institutions flag the difficulty of explaining to colleagues in standard programmes that dual provision has different structural requirements (FHJ). Key challenges include misaligned semester schedules, assessment methods, resits, and pedagogical approaches across institutions, and developing joint Study and Examination Regulations must align with each country's legislation (Savonia). Legal barriers and limited company capacity also affect the availability of placements for students (KUT; JvNU).

The consultation adds a conceptual dimension to this regulatory challenge: the term "industry" does not translate uniformly across all sectors or national contexts (MU). Organisations in education, culture, the social economy, and public services frequently do not self-identify with "industrial" dual models, even where their operational structure is functionally compatible with dual education requirements (MU). This definitional

⁷ Prior EU-funded work on this question, notably the Apprenticeship Q project (completed 2020), produced guidelines for quality assurance of practical phases in work-based learning that are directly relevant to the alliance's context.

gap creates a barrier to partnership formation and to accessing the support frameworks designed for dual provision, particularly in countries where the legal and funding architecture for dual education was built around manufacturing or engineering sectors (MU, DHBW). The alliance's approach of maintaining mandatory minimum standards within an adaptable framework, as embodied in the DHE Framework, is the appropriate response to this diversity, but it requires active dissemination to sectors where the dual concept remains unfamiliar. This is pursued through the alliance's Knowledge Exchange Seminars, annual conferences, and publication channels.

The alliance's adoption of "World of Work" (WoW) as its standard terminology for workplace partners is a deliberate response to this definitional gap, replacing sector-specific language with a framework applicable across education, culture, the social economy, public services, and traditional industrial sectors alike. Dissemination of the dual concept beyond its traditional industrial framing is already underway through the alliance's Knowledge Exchange Seminars, annual conferences, and publication channels.

The practical implication is that the alliance cannot operate a single model across nine countries. The DHE Framework was designed to accommodate this diversity by providing adaptable guidance within mandatory minimum standards rather than prescribing a uniform approach.

Policy relevance: This finding reinforces the case for a common definitional framework for dual higher education at EU level (Recommendation 1) and for national-level recognition instruments that are sector-neutral rather than restricted to traditional industrial contexts (Recommendation 6). The alliance's adoption of "World of Work" (WoW) as its standard terminology for workplace partners offers a concrete model for sector-neutral language that EU-level policy frameworks and national recognition instruments could adopt.

Box 2.1 – Key Takeaways from the TRN Practitioner Consultation

Nine partner institutions contributed to this consultation. The following points represent the most salient cross-cutting insights for policymakers and institutional leaders.

1. **The academic-industry balance cannot be left to ad hoc negotiation.** Every institution reports ongoing tension between academic rigour and workplace expectations. Where it works, the solution is structural: industry defines what is relevant; faculty controls how it is taught. A common quality framework is needed to anchor this balance across diverse national systems. The depth of this challenge varies by national context: in Member States with established VET frameworks that confer certified training authorisation at workplace level, employers already carry a recognised duty of pedagogical co-responsibility; in countries without such frameworks, the barrier is more foundational.
2. **SMEs are underrepresented in dual partnerships, and mentor quality is inconsistent.** Cooperation with large employers functions well, but smaller enterprises lack the capacity for sustained engagement. Corporate mentors, regardless of company size, rarely receive formal pedagogical training. Both gaps require system-level responses, not institutional workarounds. The alliance's tiered industry partnership framework (Recommendation 10) is designed to address the SME engagement gap.
3. **Dual graduates outperform their peers on employability and professional readiness, but the evidence is not yet systematically collected.** Institutions report employability rates approaching 95%, accelerated professional identity formation, and stronger soft skills. However, no alliance-wide baseline data exists to substantiate these claims at scale -- a gap that also has direct bearing on the credibility of the DHE Quality Label, which cannot reliably certify quality without baseline data.
4. **Research is the weakest link in dual provision.** Limited time, misaligned incentives, and the undervaluation of applied research by traditional academic ranking systems constrain researcher engagement. The most promising model positions student thesis work as a component of broader institutional research projects with companies, rather than as a standalone requirement. The DHE Framework's current treatment of research within the Teaching and Learning dimension leaves applied dual research without a standalone profile or quality criteria -- a gap the next Framework iteration must address.
5. **Cross-border collaboration depends on seed funding and institutional recognition, not platforms alone.** Practitioners consistently identify the start-up costs of partnership -- aligning agendas, agreeing methods, establishing trust -- as the real barrier. Digital platforms are valued only when linked to concrete funding opportunities and project calls.
6. **Workplace learning assessment is fragmented.** Practice ranges from structured tri-party evaluation frameworks to subjective feedback. No standardised assessment tools exist at alliance level, and mentor training to support quality assurance is not systematically provided. The DHE Quality Label is the alliance's primary mechanism for driving convergence in assessment practice; prior EU-funded work, notably the Apprenticeship Q project, provides a foundation the alliance intends to build on in a future funding cycle.
7. **Regulatory diversity is a permanent condition, not a problem to be solved.** Nine countries mean nine legal frameworks. The DHE Framework's approach of mandatory minimum standards within an adaptable structure is the right response, but the concept of "dual education" itself must be broadened beyond its traditional industrial framing to reach sectors in education, culture, and the social economy. The alliance's adoption of "World of Work" (WoW) as its standard terminology offers a concrete model for sector-neutral language that EU-level frameworks could adopt.

Chapter 3: From Evidence to Action: Policy Recommendations

The following twelve recommendations are derived from the evidence base set out in Chapter 2 and are organised by governance level.

SECTION A — EU LEVEL

Recommendations 1–5 · Addressed to the European Commission and EU co-legislators

THE ALLIANCE CALLS UPON THE EUROPEAN UNION TO:

EU RECOMMENDATION 1

Establish a European Reference Framework for Dual Higher Education

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS

Four years of transnational implementation across nine EU Member States demonstrate that the absence of a common definitional baseline for dual higher education generates cumulative institutional uncertainty. Alliance institutions have operationalised a seven-condition Dual Higher Education (DHE) Framework 1.0, requiring, inter alia, a minimum 20% ECTS work-placement component, formal tripartite agreements, and integrated quality assurance between the higher education institution and the workplace partner; a further iteration of the Framework is already under development (see Recommendation 9). This framework is currently being piloted across the alliance's joint dual Master's programmes and tested through the iDual cross-border mobility scheme.

Without a shared European reference, mutual recognition of dual credentials, cross-border work placements, and quality comparability remain dependent on ad hoc institutional arrangements rather than durable structural foundations. Alliance implementation evidence and TRN practitioner findings further indicate that the challenge of embedding co-educational responsibility at the workplace varies significantly by national context. In Member States where existing VET frameworks confer certified training authorisation at workplace level, employers already carry a legally recognised duty of pedagogical co-responsibility; the transition to dual higher education requires transposing an established competence to a higher EQF level. In Member States without such frameworks, the infrastructure for workplace co-responsibility does not yet exist, and a European Reference Framework developed without reference to this variation risks duplicating or contradicting established national systems rather than building on them.

CALLS UPON

The alliance calls upon the European Commission (DG EAC, DG EMPL), with the support of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council, to recognise the EU4DUAL DHE Framework, developed through comparative analysis across nine national systems, currently being piloted through the alliance's joint dual master's programmes, and subject to ongoing development (see Recommendation 9), as the reference blueprint for a European Reference Framework for Dual Higher Education, to be established through a non-binding Council Recommendation. Such a framework would enable other European University alliances and institutions operating dual provision to adopt common minimum definitional criteria on a voluntary basis,

with mutual recognition and comparability of dual provision across Member States developing as a longer-term outcome of adoption. The alliance further invites the Commission to ensure that this work is developed in explicit dialogue with EU VET policy frameworks, including the Osnabrück Declaration and Cedefop's work on apprenticeship quality, so that existing national VET authorisation and training responsibility infrastructure is recognised as a foundation for dual higher education rather than treated as a parallel and separate track.

EU RECOMMENDATION 2

Clarify and Reduce Regulatory Obstacles to Cross-Border Work-Based Learning

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS

The design and development of the iDual mobility scheme and the Joint Dual Master's programmes have brought into focus persistent structural barriers to cross-border work-based learning placements that are not resolved by existing EU free movement provisions. These barriers are consistent with those documented in comparable cross-border mobility schemes across Europe and include: inconsistent application of existing rules governing the student/trainee legal status across Member States during work-based learning periods; inconsistent application of social security coordination rules under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 to dual students; liability and insurance gaps where workplace accidents occur in a host Member State under a non-resident student contract; and divergent national labour law frameworks that classify dual students differently, in some cases as employees, in others as students, with material consequences for placement viability. Left unaddressed, these barriers risk undermining the cross-border dimension of dual higher education before it can be meaningfully tested at scale.

CALLS UPON

The alliance calls upon the European Commission to review how existing rules, including social security coordination under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 and relevant free movement provisions, apply to dual higher education students undertaking cross-border work-based learning placements, and to develop, in consultation with Member States, a clarificatory instrument or guidance document addressing the legal status, liability, and insurance frameworks applicable to such placements. This is a request for clarification of how existing rules apply, not for new EU competence over the contractual terms of the placement or employment relationship (e.g., its duration, remuneration, and working conditions) remain matters for national law and for negotiation between students, institutions, and employers.

Recognising that EU-level clarification may take time to develop, the alliance further invites Member States with significant bilateral student mobility flows to pursue interim bilateral arrangements clarifying these questions for specific placement corridors, an incremental step that can proceed independently of, and inform, the EU-level instrument. The alliance further invites Member States to consider reviewing national labour law classifications of dual students; specific guidance on this is set out in Recommendation 6.

EU RECOMMENDATION 3

Align Erasmus+ Programme Rules with Dual Mobility Requirements

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS	Current Erasmus+ mobility grant rules are calibrated to conventional academic exchange and do not adequately accommodate the operational requirements of dual mobility. Documented misalignments include minimum duration requirements that conflict with structured work-placement calendars negotiated with industry partners; restrictions on grant portability to work-based learning placements in sectors not classified as 'traineeship' under programme guidelines; and reporting obligations and funding ceilings that do not reflect the higher coordination costs of tripartite dual placements (student–institution–employer).
CALLS UPON	The alliance calls upon the European Commission to review and revise, within the existing Erasmus+ programme framework and its implementing provisions, the eligibility, duration, and reporting rules applicable to work-based learning mobility under dual higher education programmes, ensuring that structured work placements forming an integral part of a dual degree programme are treated as fully eligible mobility activities on equivalent terms to conventional academic exchange.

EU RECOMMENDATION 4**Strengthen the European Degree Label Criteria for Programmes with Substantial Work-Integrated Learning.**

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS	The alliance has developed two joint dual master's programmes — both accredited through the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes — that meet the structural features the Label is built around (joint curriculum design, cross-border delivery, shared quality assurance, and transnational cohorts), with an additional dimension: a minimum of 20% of ECTS gained through practical learning in the world of work, co-assessed by academic and industry partners through a Joint Academic Coordination Board. The current Label criteria recognise employability and learning beyond academia under Dimension B.2 but do not set specific standards for programmes built around substantial, assessed workplace learning, leaving ambiguity about whether such joint dual programmes qualify and under what conditions industry co-certification is recognised.
CALLS UPON	The alliance calls upon the European Commission (DG EAC) to build on Dimension B.2 so that the European Degree Label criteria and quality assurance requirements set specific standards for programmes with substantial, assessed workplace learning, and to consult dual higher education alliances, European employer organisations, and quality assurance agencies in developing them. The alliance further invites the relevant expert group overseeing Label development to consider the DHE Framework's seven-condition model as a reference standard for the dual dimension.

EU RECOMMENDATION 5**Establish a Dedicated Data Monitoring System for Dual Higher Education**

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS	The alliance's Observatory on Dual Higher Education, currently in development, will produce the first systematic European-level mapping of dual higher education provision, including programme types, student volumes, employer engagement models, and national regulatory conditions. This is a gap: no comparable data infrastructure currently exists at EU level.
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CALLS UPON	The Jan 2025 Commission report on the European Universities initiative provides important baseline data on alliance activities across 65 alliances but does not disaggregate by educational modality or capture the specific dimensions of dual and work-integrated provision.
	The alliance calls upon the European Commission (DG EAC) to support the development of the EU4DUAL Observatory on Dual Higher Education as a European-level data resource, and to explore, within the framework of the European Universities initiative's impact monitoring architecture, mechanisms for integrating Observatory outputs into Commission monitoring of work-integrated learning provision across the initiative. The alliance further invites Cedefop and the European Training Foundation to consider collaborative data-sharing arrangements with the Observatory given their respective mandates on skills and VET monitoring.

THE ALLIANCE CALLS UPON THE COUNTRIES TO:

SECTION B — NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

Recommendations 6–8 · Addressed to Member State Ministries and Regional Authorities

NATIONAL /REGIONAL - RECOMMENDATION 6

Establish or Strengthen National Legal Frameworks for Dual Higher Education

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS	Across the alliance's nine Member States, the legal status of dual higher education varies substantially, and the variation is better understood as a gradient than as a binary. Some Member States have legal and regulatory architectures that address dual higher education in dedicated terms, defining the student's status, the employer's obligations, the funding mechanism, and the quality assurance framework as an integrated whole. Others rely on general work-based learning or apprenticeship instruments that are scoped across qualification levels and provide a functioning legal basis, but are not purpose-built for dual higher education and are not complemented by dedicated national policy at higher education level.⁸ Several Member States have no comparable framework at all, and dual programmes operate in a legal grey zone that inhibits employer participation, restricts student access to social protections, and creates accreditation uncertainty. Alliance institutions operating in Member States without a dedicated legal framework have consistently identified the absence, or the underdevelopment, of such a framework as a primary structural barrier to scaling dual provision at institutional level.
CALLS UPON	The alliance calls upon national Ministries of Higher Education and, where relevant, national Ministries of Labour, to review existing legislative and regulatory frameworks for work-integrated learning in higher education, and, on the basis of that review, either to establish a dedicated legal basis for dual higher education programmes where none currently exists, or to strengthen and complement existing instruments where these cover dual higher education only as part of a broader work-based learning remit. Such

⁸ Examples across the alliance illustrate this gradient. Austria and Germany have dedicated legal and regulatory instruments for dual higher education. Malta's Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (Cap. 576) of 2018 is scoped across qualification levels, including the higher levels, and provides the legal basis for dual higher education in practice.

frameworks should address, as an integrated set, provisions on student legal status during workplace periods, employer obligations, accreditation criteria, and student financial support. Questions of cross-border labour law classification of dual students, and the EU-level instruments needed to resolve them, are addressed in Recommendation 2.

NATIONAL /REGIONAL - RECOMMENDATION 7

Align National and Regional Funding Instruments with Dual Higher Education Requirements

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS

Alliance institutions in multiple Member States have encountered a structural funding misalignment: national and regional higher education funding formulae are calibrated to conventional full-time academic provision and do not reflect the higher unit costs of dual programme delivery. These additional costs include: employer liaison and placement coordination infrastructure; tripartite quality assurance processes; supervision capacity development for workplace mentors; and the administrative overhead of managing structured work-placement agreements with large numbers of SME partners. Where national funding does not account for these costs, institutions cross-subsidise dual provision from other budget lines or restrict enrolment to the minimum viable scale, preventing the development of dual programmes as a mainstream pathway.

CALLS UPON

The alliance calls upon national Ministries of Higher Education and regional authorities responsible for higher education funding to review the adequacy of existing funding formulae for dual higher education programmes and to consider establishing dedicated funding streams or cost-adjustment mechanisms that reflect the higher unit costs of dual programme delivery, including employer liaison, placement coordination, and tripartite quality assurance. The alliance further invites Managing Authorities for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to consider dual higher education programme development as an eligible activity under relevant investment priorities.

NATIONAL /REGIONAL - RECOMMENDATION 8

Embed Dual Higher Education in Regional Smart Specialisation and Innovation Ecosystem Strategies

FROM EVIDENCE, THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS

Smart Specialisation Strategies (S4+) provide regional authorities with co-funding channels, employer cluster engagement mechanisms, and a regional policy framework capable of anchoring dual higher education development beyond individual institutional decisions.

Where S4+ strategies do not explicitly reference dual higher education or work-integrated learning, this enabling infrastructure is absent, and the conditions for systemic, rather than isolated, programme development are significantly weakened. The alliance proposes Knowledge Valorisation Hubs as a mechanism for embedding dual higher education and applied research within regional industrial ecosystems in the next programming period, with each Hub co-anchored by a university–industry–regional authority partnership aligned to a specific technological domain.

CALLS UPON

The alliance calls upon regional authorities to integrate dual higher education into Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3/S4) priorities and regional innovation ecosystem planning. This includes aligning Knowledge Valorisation Hub themes with regional economic priorities and ensuring that dual higher education institutions are recognised as strategic partners in regional skills development and technology transfer.

THE ALLIANCE CALLS UPON THE ALLIANCE PARTNERS TO:**SECTION C — ALLIANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**

Recommendations 9–12 · Alliance commitments and institutional-level actions

ALLIANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL- RECOMMENDATION 9**Consolidate and Extend the EU4DUAL DHE Framework as a European Quality Standard****FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS**

The DHE Framework has been applied to all joint dual Master's programmes and is the operational basis for the **EU4DUAL Quality Label** currently in development. The Framework was designed with two functions: internal alliance quality assurance and external transferability to institutions and alliances outside EU4DUAL. Evidence from the TRN Taskforce, the OTIP programme, and the Leadership Academy demonstrates practitioner demand for a recognised, transferable quality standard specific to **dual higher education**, one that signals programme quality to employers, partner institutions, and students across national systems. The Label's credibility with external institutions depends on its scope being clearly distinct from national accreditation and external quality assurance processes — a distinction that is not yet explicit in the current working documentation.

CALLS UPON

The alliance commits to developing a **DHE Quality Label** operationalising the Framework's seven criteria as a certification scheme accessible to institutions beyond EU4DUAL membership. The Label certifies the dual features of a programme, specifically, whether it meets the structural criteria for work-integrated higher education as defined by the DHE Framework. It is not a substitute for, and operates entirely separately from, national accreditation and the external quality assurance processes carried out by ENQA/EQAR-registered agencies under the European Standards and Guidelines. A Label-bearing programme must hold the relevant national accreditation or programme approval applicable in its jurisdiction. The two instruments have distinct and non-overlapping scopes.

The alliance further commits to ensuring that structured student participation is embedded within the DHE Quality Label certification process, in line with the principle of student involvement in quality assurance established under the European Standards and Guidelines.

ALLIANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL - RECOMMENDATION 10**Scale the Knowledge Valorisation Hub Model as a Mechanism for Industry-Embedded Dual Research****FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS**

The Knowledge Valorisation Hub (KVH) architecture emerged from the transition of the Grand Challenges framework -- which organised transnational student and researcher collaboration around societal problems -- to a more institutionalised model co-anchored in specific industrial domains. Evidence from Grand Challenge implementation demonstrates that co-design with industry partners significantly increases the relevance of dual research outputs, student project quality, and employer willingness to formalise mentoring and supervision commitments. The Hub model adds permanence and sector-specificity to this dynamic. **Six Knowledge Valorisation Hubs have been confirmed for launch in the 2027–2028 phase**, each meeting the five prerequisite conditions set out in the application; this figure represents the initial cohort and is expected to grow as additional partner institutions and industry co-anchors meet the participation requirements.

Alliance implementation and ICC consultation evidence consistently identify uneven engagement by company size as a structural constraint on industry partnership. A single partnership model cannot serve both large industrial partners capable of full programme co-governance and SMEs that require lighter, more accessible collaboration pathways. The ICC formally proposed a tiered industry partnership framework at its April 2025 Bidart session to address this gap.

CALLS UPON

The alliance calls upon associated industry partners, regional authorities, and research funding bodies to formalise their engagement with the **Knowledge Valorisation Hub governance structures**, and invites other European University alliances to consider the Hub model as a transferable mechanism for industry-embedded dual research. The alliance commits to establishing the Hubs on the timeline set out in the 2026–2028 application, including confirmed governance arrangements with industry co-anchors, verified co-funding commitments, and alignment with regional Smart Specialisation priorities. The alliance further commits to implementing a tiered industry partnership framework, with differentiated membership conditions, obligations, and entry points designed to extend meaningful participation to SMEs alongside larger industrial partners.

ALLIANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL - RECOMMENDATION 11**Strengthen Equity, Inclusion, and Learner Support Frameworks for Dual Higher Education****FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS**

Stakeholder consultation evidence — particularly from the Student Council across all three annual conferences and from the TRN Taskforce Focus Group — identifies a consistent equity challenge in dual higher education: the model's demands on students (simultaneous academic and workplace commitments, cross-institution coordination, often combined with reduced grant eligibility due to employer contracts) systematically disadvantage students from lower-income backgrounds, students with caring responsibilities, and students with disabilities requiring workplace

CALLS UPON	accommodation. Current alliance student support frameworks address individual needs at institutional level but do not provide a common minimum standard for dual student support across the alliance. The iDual mobility scheme has begun to address the internationalisation dimension of access, but financial and pastoral support gaps remain.
	The alliance commits to developing and adopting a common minimum standard for dual student support across all member institutions, covering financial support arrangements, academic pastoral care adapted to the dual context, workplace accommodation procedures for students with disabilities, and mentoring frameworks for students from underrepresented groups.¹ The alliance further commits to integrating inclusion indicators within the Observatory's monitoring framework, against which member institutions will report annually, and to engaging national and regional authorities on the recognition of dual student financial support within national student support frameworks, including through the development of common voluntary data collection standards for equity and inclusion indicators. <i>¹ Including first-generation higher education students, students from low-income households, and mature students.</i>

ALLIANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL - RECOMMENDATION 12

Develop Sustainable Revenue and Governance Models for Dual Higher Education Beyond the Grant Cycle

FROM EVIDENCE THE ALLIANCE SUGGESTS	The transition from EU4DUAL as a grant-funded project to EUDUAL AISBL as a self-sustaining legal entity is the alliance's most significant governance challenge. Evidence from the AISBL development process and from the sustainability planning documentation indicates that three revenue streams are viable in the medium term: DHE Quality Label certification fees from external institutions, consultancy and capacity-building services delivered through the Centre of Excellence and Leadership Academy, and co-funding contributions from Knowledge Valorisation Hub industry partners. However, no single stream is sufficient to sustain the full scope of alliance activities, and the revenue model depends on the DHE Framework achieving sufficient external recognition to make the DHE Quality Label commercially credible.
CALLS UPON	The alliance commits to completing the operational transfer to the EUDUAL AISBL on the timeline set out in the governance documentation, activating the three identified revenue streams — DHE Quality Label certification, Centre of Excellence services, and KVH industry co-funding — before the end of the current grant period, and establishing a financial reserves target sufficient to sustain core functions across a defined transition period, as specified in the AISBL Business Plan. The alliance further commits to formalising membership contribution arrangements with member institutions under the AISBL statutes, and to actively advocating, through its engagement with EU-level policy processes, for mechanisms that support the institutional continuity of legally established European University alliance entities within the Investment Pathway for European Universities alliances currently under development for the 2028–2034 financial programming period.

Chapter 4: Call to Action

The twelve recommendations set out in this paper are directed at three governance levels, because the barriers to dual higher education are distributed across three governance levels. No single actor can remove them. Progress depends on coordinated action where each actor moves on the lever it actually controls.

At EU level, the most consequential gap is definitional. Without a shared reference framework for dual higher education, the European Degree Label criteria will continue to be developed without specific standards for programmes with substantial work-integrated learning, Erasmus+ mobility rules will remain calibrated to academic exchange rather than tripartite placement models, and data on dual provision across the initiative will remain incomparable. The Commission is invited to address this gap through the instruments already available to it: a non-binding Council Recommendation modelled on the 2022 micro-credentials precedent, targeted adjustments to Erasmus+ programme rules in the post-2027 cycle, and integration of the EU4DUAL Observatory's monitoring architecture into the European Universities initiative's impact framework. These are not new legislative instruments. They are clarifications and alignments within existing frameworks.

At national and regional level, the structural constraint is regulatory inconsistency. Cross-border work placements remain administratively complex because the legal status of dual learners during placement periods, their social security coverage, and employer liability arrangements are handled differently across Member States. Regional authorities, meanwhile, hold significant untapped leverage: ESF+ and ERDF instruments can be programmed to support the full dual education model, and Smart Specialisation priorities can be aligned with the Knowledge Valorisation Hub themes the alliance is developing for its 2027–2028 phase. Member States and regional governments are invited to act on both fronts, using the evidence base in this paper as a basis for national regulatory review and regional programming decisions.

At alliance and institutional level, EU4DUAL is not asking for commitments it has not itself made. The recommendations addressed to external actors in Sections A and B of Chapter 3 are grounded in the alliance's own operational experience, and the four commitments set out in Section C, consolidating the DHE Framework as an external quality standard, establishing the Knowledge Valorisation Hubs, strengthening learner support and inclusion frameworks, and completing the transition to a sustainable governance model under the EUDUAL AISBL, represent the alliance's contribution to the conditions that make the external asks credible. Those commitments are binding on the alliance and will be tracked through the Observatory's monitoring framework.

The recommendations in this paper are also transferable. The barriers they address: regulatory fragmentation, the absence of quality frameworks specific to workplace-integrated learning, misalignment between funding instruments and dual programme costs, are not unique to EU4DUAL. They are structural features of the European higher education landscape that any institution or alliance pursuing work-integrated learning at degree level will encounter. The policy responses proposed here are designed to address these constraints at the governance level where the relevant lever sits, making the framework applicable beyond the alliance and beyond the current programme cycle.

EU4DUAL offers what it has built over four years as a working foundation: a tested quality framework, a functional legal entity, an evidence base drawn from nine national systems, and a model for industry-embedded dual research. The question now is whether the policy environment will be configured to allow that foundation to be used.

References

1. EU Legislative and Regulatory Instruments

- [1] Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems, OJ L 166, 30.4.2004, p. 1. [Cited in relation to cross-border social security coverage for dual students on work placements.]
- [2] Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education, training, youth and sport (Erasmus+ Regulation), OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1. [Cited in relation to Erasmus+ mobility rules and programme design.]
- [3] Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (Common Provisions Regulation), OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159. [Cited as the regulatory basis for Smart Specialisation Strategies (S4+) under ERDF/ESF+ cohesion policy.]
- [4] Directive 2022/2464/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No 537/2014, Directive 2004/109/EC, Directive 2006/43/EC and Directive 2013/34/EU, as regards corporate sustainability reporting (CSRD), OJ L 322, 16.12.2022, p. 15. [Cited in relation to sustainability reporting principles adaptable to higher education contexts.]
- [5] Directive (EU) 2026/470 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 February 2026 (Omnibus I simplification package, amending the CSRD and CSDDD), OJ L, published 26 February 2026, entered into force 18 March 2026. [Narrows CSRD scope to undertakings with more than 1,000 employees and over EUR 450 million net turnover.]

2. Council Recommendations and Resolutions

- [6] Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 10 (2022/C 243/02). [Primary source for the definition of micro-credentials used in the Glossary and Chapter 1.]
- [7] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (Council Recommendation on European Universities), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1. [Cited as the framework for European Universities alliances and inter-institutional legal status.]
- [8] Council Resolution of 12 May 2025 on a joint European degree label and the next steps towards a possible joint European degree, OJ C, C/2025/2939, 22.5.2025. [Sets out a phased roadmap to 2029: Phase 1 (2025–2026), finalising preparations for the rollout of the label; Phase 2 (2026–2028), rollout, monitoring, evaluation, and feasibility and exploratory work on a possible joint European degree; followed by a possible Council decision on long-term implementation. Cited for the European Degree Label timeline.] *See also:* Council Recommendation of 12 May 2025 on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education, OJ C, C/2025/3006, 28.5.2025. [Establishes the joint European degree label and its criteria; primary source for the European Degree Label definition used in the Glossary.]

3. European Commission Communications and Reports

- [9] European Commission, *A Blueprint for a European Degree*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2024) 144 final, 27 March 2024. [Cited in the policy context table as the basis for the European Degree Label pathway; also cited in the Glossary.]
- [10] European Commission, *A Competitiveness Compass for the EU*, Communication from the Commission, COM(2025) 30 final, January 2025. [Cited in the Executive Summary, policy context table, and Chapter 1 in relation to university-industry collaboration, skills for strategic sectors, and human capital as a competitiveness enabler.]

[11] European Commission, *Union of Skills*, Communication from the Commission, COM(2025) 90 final, 5 March 2025. [Primary source for the Union of Skills definition in the Glossary; cited throughout Chapters 1 and 2 in relation to the four-strand skills framework and European Universities alliances as delivery mechanisms.]

[12] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative*, January 2025, Publications Office of the European Union, ISBN 978-92-68-20047-6. [Cited for evidence on the 65 alliances assessed, stakeholder engagement gaps, and industry governance findings.]

[26] Operational Guide for the Joint European Degree Label, European Commission, DG EAC, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2026, ISBN 978-92-68-40124-8, doi: 10.2766/7148441. [Operationalises the label criteria, including Dimension B (European dimension) and criterion B.2 on learning beyond academia and employability; primary source for Recommendation 4. Reference number retained to preserve in-text cross-references.]

4. Ministerial Declarations and Intergovernmental Processes

[13] Herning Declaration on Attractive and Inclusive Vocational Education and Training for Increased Competitiveness and Quality Jobs 2026-2030 (Copenhagen Process Ministerial Declaration), endorsed 12 September 2025. [Cited in the policy context table and Chapter 1 in relation to higher-level VET at EQF 6-8, parity of esteem, apprenticeship mobility, and employers as co-educators; feeds into the forthcoming EU VET strategy under the Union of Skills.]

5. External Reports and Studies

[14] Draghi, M., *The Future of European Competitiveness*, Report to the European Commission, September 2024. [Cited in the Executive Summary and Chapter 1 in relation to Europe's productivity, innovation, and skills gap as binding constraints on competitiveness. Available at: European Commission website.]

6. EU4DUAL Alliance Documents

[15] EU4DUAL Centre of Excellence on Dual Higher Education, *DHE Framework 1.0*, EU4DUAL Project Deliverable, 2024 (ERASMUS-EDU-2022-EUR-UNIV, Grant Agreement No. 101089937). [Cited as the definitional and quality assurance framework for Dual Higher Education as used throughout the White Paper; the only version officially approved by the rectors.]

[16] EU4DUAL Alliance, Policy White Paper 2024 (First Edition), validated by the Business Outreach Committee, 6 September 2024. [Cited for the evolution of the White Paper across editions.]

[17] EU4DUAL Alliance, Policy White Paper 2025 (Second Edition), validated following the Second Annual Conference, 1 April 2025, Anglet, France. [Cited as the preceding edition of this document.]

[18] EUDUAL University Association AISBL, Erasmus+ Application, Proposal ID 101331065, submitted 4 March 2026. [Authoritative source for factual claims about the alliance's composition, activities, and KVV/iDual structures.]

[19] EU4DUAL Alliance, Policy Brief 2026, companion document to this White Paper. [The Policy Brief covers Recommendations 1–5 (EU level) and 6–8 (national/regional level). Available at: Google Docs (working document).]

7. EU Frameworks and Platforms (referenced by name; no single document citation)

The following instruments are referenced in the White Paper by name. Where no specific legislative citation is made in the text, the standard reference is provided here for completeness.

[20] European Education Area (EEA): European Commission framework since 2017; see Commission Communication COM(2020) 625 final.

[21] European Research Area (ERA): renewed governance framework, Council Conclusions of 26 November 2021.

[22] European Higher Education Area (EHEA) / Bologna Process: intergovernmental process since 1999; tools include ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015).

[23] European Qualifications Framework (EQF): Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017, OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 15. [Referenced at EQF levels 6-8 throughout the White Paper.]

[24] Smart Specialisation Platform (S3/S4+): European Commission Joint Research Centre. See also Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 [ref. 3 above].

[25] European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): established under Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 and Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 respectively, both 24 June 2021.

Annex 1: TRN Taskforce Questionnaire Instrument

The following questions were distributed by the Teaching and Research Network (TRN) Taskforce to teaching staff and researchers across EU4DUAL partner institutions in 2025-2026. Responses informed the practitioner evidence base presented in Chapter 2 of this White Paper. The instrument comprised a common set of questions for all respondents, followed by track-specific questions for teaching staff and for researchers respectively.

Section A: General Questions (All Respondents)

1. What opportunities and challenges have you experienced in delivering dual education programmes?
2. How can research within the dual education framework be enhanced to contribute to academic and industry advancements?
3. What support or resources are necessary to effectively implement dual education methodologies?
4. How do you assess the impact of dual education on student learning outcomes and engagement?
5. In what ways can collaboration among educators across EU4DUAL institutions be strengthened to share best practices?

Section B: Teaching Staff

1. What specific teaching challenges or opportunities have you faced when engaging with dual education programmes?
2. How do you perceive the balance between academic requirements and industry expectations in your courses?
3. What types of training or peer support would help you better integrate dual education into your teaching practice?
4. Have you experienced differences in engagement or outcomes between dual and regular students?

Section C: Researchers

1. What are the most pressing research questions emerging from dual education that you believe should be prioritised?
2. How do you currently collaborate with industry in your research, and what barriers have you encountered?
3. Would a shared EU4DUAL research platform (e.g. profile database, partner matching) support your academic work? If yes, how?
4. What incentives would motivate you to engage more actively in cross-border or interdisciplinary research within EU4DUAL?

In what ways can the dual education system enrich your scientific work and/or make it more socially impactful?

Annex 2: Policy Brief 2026 - Dual Higher Education as a Driver of European Competitiveness

Link to document:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RVW2Lopn-ejSFoyhnAEztYCvVFGvEalfx250sFD4-7U/edit?usp=sharing>

Annex 3: Long-term Joint Mission

Link: <https://eu4dualmu.emdesk.com/#!/documents/direct/d145145>