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Editorial: towards a better future through student voices, networks, community and learning ecologies

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Introduction

Higher education stands at a crossroads. Institutions are increasingly confronted with rapid societal, environmental, and technological change, while simultaneously navigating a polycrisis that challenges traditional modes of teaching, learning, and community building. In that context, honors education across Europe has the potential to play a pivotal role — not only as incubator of individual talent, but as a crucible for innovation in pedagogy, interdisciplinarity, and community-driven transformation. With this issue, accompanying the 2025 International Honors Conference in Oslo, Norway, this journal ‘Talent and Transdisciplinarity in Education’ reaffirms its commitment to those ambitions.

In what follows, we reflect on the significance of the most recent conference, outline the contributions collected in this issue, and articulate a vision for how honors education in Europe can assist higher education institutions to evolve into a dynamic, networked, and adaptive ecosystem — a “learning ecology” — in which students, educators, external stakeholders, and emerging technologies coalesce in sustained dialogue, collaboration, and shared purpose.

The 2025 Honors Conference: building community, dialogue, and networks

The 2025 International Honors Conference served as a vital milestone for the honors community in Europe. By gathering a lot of students, educators, researchers, and practitioners from across the continent, the event instantiated one of the core missions of the European Honors Council: to foster exchange, mutual learning, and the building of a transnational honors community.

Through a rich programme of presentations, workshops, and dialogues, participants shared innovative practices, examined challenges, and envisioned future trajectories for honors, talent development and transdisciplinarity in diverse national contexts. This conference reaffirmed that beyond institutional silos and national boundaries, there is a shared aspiration: to nurture communities of excellence rooted in collaboration, experimentation

and mutual support. In doing so, the event did not only reflect existing practices — it seeded the possibility of a pan-European honors student network, whose potential we are only beginning to uncover.

This volume collects a range of high-quality papers, notes, and reflections that partly emerged from that gathering. They capture the diversity of approaches to honors education: from interdisciplinary programmes to peer-advising initiatives, from community building strategies to experiments in innovative learning environments. Together, they illustrate both the breadth and depth of what “honors” can mean.

Contributions in this issue: A testament to innovation and diversity

The JEHC has consistently positioned itself not merely as a repository of research, but as a living forum for good practices, novel ideas, and shared learning. Past issues illustrate this well: for example, the 2017 special issue on “Honors Communities” — which followed the 2017 International Honors Conference in Windesheim, The Netherlands — underlined the centrality of community, co-creation, and shared commitment in honors education.

In the present issue, the collected contributions continue in that spirit. They showcase how honors programmes across Europe (and beyond) are experimenting with structural embedding of excellence, interdisciplinary curricula, peer mentoring, and innovative learning environments. The articles showcase the importance of creating common language and knowledge exchange, supporting teacher professionalization, stimulating research about honors, and enabling networking among stakeholders.

Moreover, by presenting a mosaic of national traditions, institutional frameworks, and educational philosophies, the contributions underscore how honors education can adapt to context — while at the same time contributing to a shared European understanding of excellence and innovation in higher education.

More than a snapshot

Some might view a conference or an academic journal issue simply as a snapshot: a temporary convergence of actors and ideas, after which the participants return to their institutional routines. We argue that the 2025 Honors Conference — and this accompanying volume — are far more than that. They represent a strategic investment in enduring structures: community, network, shared language, and institutional memory. Students are invited to create an European Network to facilitate the future. This issue shares students’ voices that are strong and compelling.

As noted in scholarship on academic editorials, the value of such pieces lies not only in transmitting information, but in shaping identity, guiding discourse, and stimulating future contributions. The JEHC, by publishing this special issue, reinforces its role as more than a passive publisher; it acts as a convener, a catalyst, a voice — a platform that helps articulate what honors education might become in a rapidly changing Europe.

In that light, the 2025 conference functions not as an isolated event, but as a generative node: a place where ideas germinate, relationships form, collaborations start, and shared visions take shape. This is in line with the ideas of the conference host INTED, Center for Interdisciplinary Education at Oslo University, to include students in the development of new interdisciplinary processes.

The resulting momentum, if nurtured, could evolve into a pan-European honors network, facilitating mobility, exchange, joint innovation, and collective responses to societal challenges.

Honors education meets systemic transformation

To realize this vision, we propose that honors education in Europe embrace the concept of a *learning ecology*: a relational, open, and adaptive organizational framework in which diverse actors — students, faculty, researchers, external stakeholders, and even technologies — engage in ongoing inquiry, collaboration, and co-creation. Both honours education and transdisciplinary processes assist in such a shift.

In such ecologies, honours, inter- and transdisciplinarity become more than a buzzword: it becomes a lever for systemic organizational transformation. Therefore, the challenge for the honors community is to sustain the momentum generated by conferences and publications, and to translate inspiration into institutional transformation.

From platform to movement

The European Honors Council (EHC) plays a unique role in this emerging ecology. Since its foundation — launched during the 2016 “Honors Futures” conference under the Dutch EU-Presidency — the EHC addressed a fundamental gap: while many honors initiatives existed across Europe, there was no overarching structure to unite them. Through successive conferences, publications, and networking efforts, the EHC (and through it JEHC) has steadily built a common language, facilitated exchange of good practices, and stimulated research and collaboration. This issue continues that tradition.

Yet, to move from platform to movement, additional efforts are needed. We encourage all stakeholders — students, educators, institutions, policymakers — to engage actively. Submit your research, share your experiences, propose pilot projects, and collaborate across national and disciplinary boundaries. The future of honors lies not in excellence, but in connection, solidarity, and shared purpose.

A call to action

This editorial ends with a call. The 2025 Honors Conference and the contributions in this volume are not the culmination — they are a starting point. We invite existing and new honors practitioners to embrace a broader vision: one of community, inter- and transdisciplinarity, and systemic transformation.

Let us envision honors not as exclusive enclaves for gifted students, but as open, dynamic, and socially embedded initiatives. **Let students facilitate the future.** Let us build a European network grounded in trust, dialogue and co-creation. Let us commit to structural change, participatory governance, and shared responsibility.

In doing so, honors education can transcend its traditional boundaries. It can become a crucible for societal innovation — nurturing not only individual talent, but collective capacity to respond to the poly-crises of our time.

We believe the JEHC can be at the heart of that transformation. We invite you — readers, researchers, educators, students — to join us. The journey begins here.

On behalf of the editorial team, we are honoured to present this issue — and to embark with you on the path ahead.