In the eye of the storm:

Higher Education in an Age of Crises

Howard Stevenson
Maria Antonietta Vega Castillo
Melanie Bhend
Vasiliki-Eleni Selechopoulou

June 2025

Education International
Internationale de l'Education
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale

About the authors:

Howard Stevenson

Professor Howard Stevenson is Emeritus Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, in the School of Education, University of Nottingham. He has researched and published widely on higher education policy and practice.

Maria Antonietta Vega Castillo

Maria Antonietta Vega Castillo is a PhD student in the School of Education, University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on understanding educator self-efficacy in South American contexts.

Melanie Bhend

Dr Melanie Bhend is an Assistant Professor of French in the School of Culture, Languages and Area Studies, University of Nottingham. Her research interests include language attitudes, inclusive pedagogies, and learning technologies.

Vasiliki-Eleni Selechopoulou

Dr Vasiliki-Eleni Selechopoulou recently completed her PhD in the School of Education, University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on comparative studies of education reforms and she has participated as a researcher in wide range of funded projects.

Education International (EI)

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing over 33 million education employees in 375 organisations in 180 countries and territories.

In the eye of the storm:

Higher education in an age of crises

Report prepared by:
Howard Stevenson
Maria Antonietta Vega Castillo
Melanie Bhend
Vasiliki-Eleni Selechopoulou

University of Nottingham
June 2025

Acknowledgements:

Table of contents

Higher education in an age of crises

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and the work of those employed in them, make a vital contribution to the improvement of contemporary societies. There are no solutions to many of today's global challenges that do not involve the input of those who work in the higher education (HE) sector – both through research and teaching. And yet, as the challenges that are evident across the world appear to intensify, the role of those working in universities and research institutes is becoming more difficult. Not only are working conditions deteriorating in many national contexts, but increasingly the work of higher education researchers and teachers is being questioned. Not as part of robust, and appropriate, scholarly debate but rather as the result of political actions in which scholarly debate is suppressed rather than encouraged. Precisely because HEIs perform such an important role in helping to frame the future, through the generation of new knowledge in myriad forms and across multiple domains, there are powerful vested interests that seek to shape their direction. Indeed, in an apparently fracturing global order, higher education institutions often find themselves at the centre of growing divisions as politicians and their allies seek to assert increasing influence over what can be researched and taught. In this sense, this report is being published at an unprecedented moment in history.

In many parts of the world, it has become commonplace to argue that '*universities are in crisis*' (Woods, 2024). This particular claim is from an article about higher education in the United Kingdom (UK), but the story it tells of chronic underfunding, job insecurity, unmanageable workloads and staff morale 'at an all-time low' is one that would be recognised in many parts of the world. However, it is not just that many higher education systems can be described as 'in crisis', but that HEIs both function in, and are a reflection of, a wider set of colliding crises that continue to have a profound impact on the

experience of those who work in the sector. Many higher education institutions may be 'in crisis', but they also exist in an age of crises (or 'polycrisis', see Tooze, 2022) in which the traditional values and purposes of public higher education are often being challenged. Higher education systems function in a world shaped by ecological crisis, economic crisis, geo-political crises and, increasingly, crises of democracy characterised by the emergence of a 'post-truth politics' (Suiter, 2016) and growing authoritarianism. These crises not only shape the context within which higher education workers undertake their work (funding, working conditions, quality of working life), but they can also frame foundational elements of the work itself – the right to determine teaching content and research agendas and the ability to participate fully in the democratic governance of higher education institutions. Many of these issues are core concerns contained within the *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* (UNESCO, 1997), but in the current context they face many challenges. The world in 2025, and the environment that higher education institutions function in, is much changed from that which prevailed in 1997. Not always better, or worse, but always very different. More complex, more uncertain and, sadly, often more dangerous.

In many ways, HEIs, including universities and research institutes, can help generate the solutions that offer the possibility of a more secure and sustainable world – offering practical steps to tackle inequalities (within and between countries), confront the climate crisis and develop technologies in ways that improve lives rather than disrupt and sometimes devastate them.

This is essential work – but it does not take place in a vacuum. Those employed in higher education institutions do not undertake their work in environments separate from the world they seek to understand, but rather their

work is decisively shaped by the very same challenges they seek to address. This report highlights many of those challenges. Based on the research we present, and an analysis of the period of 'polycrisis' within which we live, we highlight three key issues, that currently present very specific challenges for those working in higher education. By implication, these challenges also impact HEIs as public institutions - both the capacity they have to contribute to tackling global challenges, and their ability to support democratic governance across civil and political society.

Austerity: higher education institutions are underfunded. In many parts of the world, this reflects a long term history of inadequate investment, but these problems were typically exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2007/8 and the failure since then to ever redress the consequences. The austerity measures imposed at that time impacted higher education disproportionately, and continue to cast a long shadow over the sector globally. However, 'austerity logic' continues to be deeply embedded in orthodox economic thinking and as global economic conditions have both deteriorated and become more unpredictable, the pressures on public investment are increasing.

Authoritarianism: the existence of authoritarian regimes is not new, and many higher education workers and trade unionists have long known what it is to live in a context where basic human rights, including labour rights and the right to academic freedom, are severely restricted. What is now apparent is that authoritarian trends are assuming new forms, and being experienced on an unprecedented scale. Often rooted in nationalistic and xenophobic movements, such currents feel threatened by open debate, critical thinking and the free exchange of knowledge and ideas. As such, the values and principles of public higher education stand at odds with many trends that are becoming increasingly dominant, and as this report illustrates, there is growing evidence that the academic freedom of those who work in higher education is being eroded. At this time, it feels hard to overstate the rising threats to academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions.

Automation: technological development is ever present in our lives, but has become increasingly important in recent years. In the time since the publication of the *UNESCO*

Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel in 1997, technology has developed enormously. In the context of higher education, technological advances have brought many benefits – not only rapidly increasing the capacity to expand new knowledge, but making it much easier for researchers to communicate and collaborate. However, it is now apparent we have entered a new phase of technology development, shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI). As a consequence, the potential benefits, but also the substantial risks, of new technologies are being posed more starkly. Ensuring benefits are maximised, and potential costs are addressed will require careful consideration of complex issues – law makers will need to engage in serious debates with stakeholders and be prepared to co-operate across national borders. Higher education workers are critical to ensuring these debates address the key issues – and they are also profoundly affected by the issues themselves (UCU Scotland, 2020). The danger however is that democratic debate and global co-ordination are subordinated to the interests of powerful corporate interests that have generated their wealth through technology development. These interests often view regulation and democratic accountability as an obstacle to securing the disruption and business growth they aspire to.

In some senses the threats posed by increasing austerity, authoritarianism and automation can be described as a 'Triple A crisis rating' - because it is often the same forces in society that are imposing the austerity, who are driving the rising authoritarianism and who control the technologies that shape the automation.

Recently, these issues have been posed most starkly in the United States where the so-called *Department of Government Efficiency* (DOGE) has been used to slash public spending across all education sectors (including efforts to dismantle the Department for Education). At the same time, the Federal government has used its own spending powers to directly attack the academic freedom of scholars and the institutional autonomy of some of the country's most high profile higher education institutions. In this instance it is important to recognise that the individual placed at the head of DOGE immediately after the Trump inauguration is the same person with enormous influence in relation to technology and Artificial

Intelligence, including the technologies that act as platforms for social media. Austerity, authoritarianism and the drive to automation are all inextricably linked through a network of powerful individuals who have shown themselves to be unconcerned about maintaining a rules-based order – domestically and internationally.

As **Todd Wolfson**, Vice-President of the *American Federation of Teachers* (AFT) and President of the *American Association of University Professors* (AAUP – affiliated to the AFT), stated when interviewed for this research, '*You do not realise how quickly countries can slip into these moments*'.

Throughout this report we provide a number of short case studies to highlight the role of trade unions in the higher education sector as they work to promote and defend the values and principles of the 1997 *Recommendation*. In the first of these short case studies we present the example of the United States, where the trade union movement seeks to respond to extraordinary developments across the higher education sector.

CASE STUDY: *Challenging the impact of authoritarian populism and defending higher education in the USA* - the *American Association of University Professors - American Federation of Teachers* (AAUP – AFT, USA).

The impact of the second Presidency of Donald Trump had an immediate and dramatic impact on higher education institutions across the United States with cuts to research programmes, attacks on migrant staff and students, threats to initiatives focused on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), and direct attacks on individual institutions such as Columbia University. One immediate impact has been to threaten the jobs and livelihoods of higher education workers, but there is also a clear challenge to academic freedom either in the form of intentional defunding (including at Harvard University) or concerns about victimisation.

The *American Association of University Professors-American Federation of Teachers* (AAUP-AFT) had to respond very rapidly to what were understood as direct attacks on the working conditions of AAUP-AFT members, but also to wider threats to the US higher education system. AFT President **Randi Weingarten** (2025) has characterised these developments as a '*war on knowledge and expression*'.

The union's work had begun in earnest as it sought to intervene in political debates in the Autumn of 2024. At that time the Presidential election campaign provided an opportunity to raise issues about inadequate higher education funding. The union's analysis is that current problems have not emerged spontaneously, but are rooted in years of underfunding of public services, including the failure to develop higher education as a truly socialised collective good.

Following the inauguration of the Trump Presidency in January 2025, and the immediate slew of Executive Orders, the union has adopted a three-pronged response. First, it has challenged many of the President's decision in the courts including the termination of the Department for Education, the attack on diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, cuts to research bodies, the imposition of a deportation programme and the specific attacks on individual institutions. Second, the union is engaging on focused and strategic lobbying of key politicians recognising that the material impacts on workers and those in the community can have political consequences for those responsible, particularly when community members are effectively mobilised. Third, the union is working to educate members around relevant issues, and equip them with the organising skills to be able to build a broad, popular campaign capable of mounting successful actions against the attacks that higher education institutions, and AAUP-AFT members, are experiencing.

Todd Wolfson, AFT Vice-President and AAUP President, has indicated there are two essential elements that underpin the union's campaign. First, is a commitment to construct a broad coalition across all the higher education sector unions, unifying a significant number of different unions that represent different groups of workers in US HEIs. Wolfson talks about an alliance that extends 'wall to wall and coast to coast'. Second, is the need to link immediate and material concerns with a much broader and optimistic vision of higher education – based on comprehensive sector funding, an end to student debt, ending contingent labour, full funding for research and support for historically black colleges and universities. The aim is to develop a 'popular front', organised around a vision of higher education that stands in stark contrast to what is currently unfolding across the sector.

The alliance is currently organised around a coalition identified as 'Labor for Higher Education', and a campaign called 'Kill the cuts' (*killthecuts.org*). Its early work has focused on making the positive case for science research and organising a series of 'days of action' to publicise the issues. It is envisaged its activities will grow as the attacks experienced in US higher education intensify.

in the future. This will be essential as it is clear that the scale of the challenges faced by the global higher education sector will require strong international institutions, combined with robust processes, to help navigate the complex times ahead. At a time when some seek to undermine an international rules-based order, the role of institutions that provide frameworks for effective global governance assume increased significance.

This report explores all these matters in detail. The first part of this report provides an overview of the key issues facing the higher education sector globally. This is based on a review of recent relevant published research, and a survey of *Education International* (EI) member organisations that represent members in the higher education sector. Interviews were also conducted with a number of officials from Educational International member organisations, and these were used to enrich the short case studies that feature in the first part of the report. The focus is broadly on 'working conditions' as they impact those employed in the higher education sector. This is not a narrow conception of working conditions, but a holistic approach in which 'working conditions' include all those factors that shape the quality of working life. This part of the report responds to the call from the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* (ILO, 2024) to adopt a revised, and updated, instrument in relation to the 1966 and 1997 *Recommendations* (both reproduced together in ILO, 2016).

The second part of the report offers observations on the role of the *Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel* (CEART). CEART is the body charged with monitoring and promoting compliance with both the 1966 and 1997 Recommendations. The analysis is based on a review of relevant CEART reports, combined with interviews with officials from EI member organisations who have drawn on the 1997 Recommendation in their negotiations with employers and governments, or who have direct experience of engaging in the CEART process through formally raising an allegation. It is presented as a contribution to the welcome debate, initiated by the *Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* (ILO, 2024), to develop a 'strengthened mandate' (ibid, p. 12) for CEART

A note on the presentation of this report

Most of the material presented in this report is based on analyses of relevant research reports that have been published in the recent past. Some of these reports were directly produced, and/or commissioned by Education International member organisations. Some of the material presented here includes responses to a short survey distributed to all EI member organisations who have members in the higher education sector. This survey was completed by 40 member organisations who represent workers in the higher education sector. We are grateful to all those who responded to the request for information. This data was supplemented by interviews with several senior officials from EI member organisations (see interviewees listed below). However, the quantitative data are relatively small scale and need to be treated with appropriate caution. There is no claim to wider generalisability from the survey, but we believe there is material of value, and so results that are considered useful and relevant are presented in this report.

The geographical distribution of responses is provided below:

Respondents by geographic area

- Europe 37%
- Africa 15%
- US and Canada 15%
- Oceania 8%
- Asia 10%
- Latin America 10%
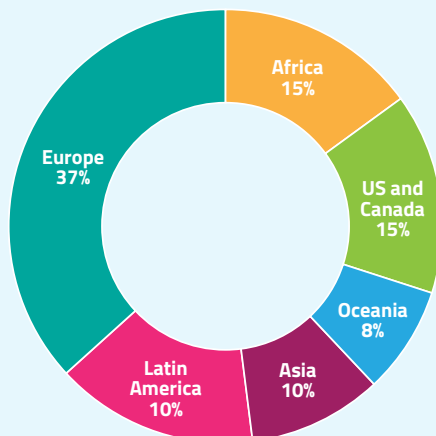
In Section 2 of the report, we present case study reports of three higher education sector trade unions that have submitted allegations to the Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART). The summaries are primarily based on interviews with union officials directly involved in developing and submitting the relevant allegations.

As indicated, research data was supplemented by interviews with representatives of several Education International member organisations. In particular we would like to thank.

Raymond Basilio, Secretary General, *Association of Concerned Teachers* (Philippines).

Rob Copeland, Policy Officer, *University and College Union* (UK).

Tommy Dalegard Madsen, *DM* (Denmark).

Rosalia Fatiaki, General Secretary, *Association of University of South Pacific Staff* (Fiji).

Sinéad Kennedy, *Irish Federation of University Teachers* (Ireland).

Grace Nyongesa, National Chair, *University Academic Staff Union* (Kenya).

Eric Rader, President of AFT Local 1650, the *Henry Ford Community College Federation of Teachers* and Co-Chair, *Higher Education Program and Policy Council*, *American Federation of Teachers* (USA).

David Robinson, Executive Director, *Canadian Association of University Teachers* (Canada).

Yamile Socolovsky, *Federación Nacional de Docentes Universitarios* - CONADU (Argentina)

Lucia Villareal, *Federación Nacional de Docentes Universitarios* - CONADU (Argentina)

Jens Vraa-Jensen, *DM* (Denmark).

Todd Wolfson, Vice-President, *American Federation of Teachers* and President, *American Association of University Professors* (USA).

The global higher education context: current issues and future challenges

In the following sections of this report, key issues highlighted in the *1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* are presented. The focus is on providing an overview of recent developments, mostly dating back to the 2021 meeting of the *Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel* (CEART). It seeks to highlight what can be described as post-pandemic trends, while also identifying issues that are developing in new forms, often at great pace.

Higher education funding

The importance of adequate resourcing for education is a thread that runs through the *1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*, and it is reiterated in the recommendations of the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession*. Paragraph 7 of the High-Level Panel's report states clearly.

> *Quality education is not possible without adequate financing. Funding for public education should be guaranteed at a level of at least 6 per cent of gross domestic product and 20 per cent of total government expenditure, as set out in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, and should allow for increasing investment per capita in education. Such spending should be transparent and shielded from austerity measures, including in policies promoted by international financial institutions. Tax revenue should allow for sustainable education financing. (ILO, 2024, p. 4)*

According to a report published by the Higher Education Strategy Associates on higher education funding (Williams & Usher, 2022), the Global North still accounts for most of the sector's public spending, although the relative annual growth in the Global South higher education field has been higher than in the Global North in recent years. This can be attributed to the trends in parts of the Global South towards the expansion of higher education, while in the Global North countries are typically not aiming to expand on this scale (ibid.). It also reflects the very low base from which much funding in the Global South starts from historically. When trends are adjusted for a growth in student numbers the inequalities in per student spending between the North and South remain substantial. Usher's (2024) recent analysis of public investment trends in higher education globally (but excluding Europe) reveals a very uneven picture with a mixture of some growth (for example, in the US) and decline (exemplified by China). The overall picture however, is even more complex, with Usher pointing out that any increase in public investment in the US typically serves to compensate for frozen or reduced tuition fees. While any re-balancing of public and private investment in favour of the former may be welcomed, it must not be confused with real increases in overall investment.

Based on the data published by UNESCO, there is significant variation in the percentage of GDP each country allocates to tertiary education. Figure 1 (next page) illustrates the relevant data for the year 2022. For the countries where 2022 was missing, the values for years 2020, 2021 or 2023 have been used instead.

Figure 1: **Government expenditure on tertiary education in 2022 as a percentage of national GDPs**
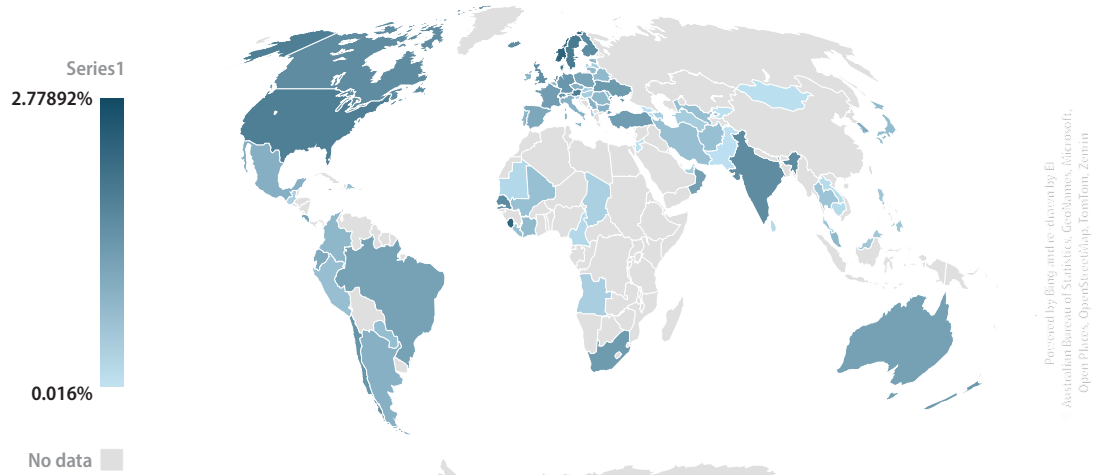
Source: Authors' depiction based on UNESCO data (UNESCO, 2023), accessed 30 June 2024.

Figure 1 indicates that the percentage of national GDP allocated to tertiary education varies from 0.016 to 2.77%. On average, globally, governments spend 0.83% of GDP on higher education. Taking a closer look at the in-country variations between 2018 and 2023, most of the countries' public funding remains fairly stable and in some cases, there are steady increases. However, in several countries (e.g. Iran, Arab Emirates, Azerbaijan, Armenia), the data show a decrease in the GDP percentage allocated to higher education, which can be attributed to the current economic, political and social turbulence in these areas (also confirmed by Williams & Usher, 2022). A decrease in the GDP percentage allocated to HE is also noted in a small number of other countries, including Albania, Andorra, Belize, Hong Kong, Eswatini, and Malaysia.

In a recent report on higher education funding for Education International, Garritzmann (2024) also highlighted the need for resource trends to be viewed in the context of increased pressures within the system. Not only has the economic crisis of 2007/8 had a long term impact, but on-going migration issues, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the wider impacts of global conflicts (and their associated inflationary shocks) have all placed increased demands on a sector under pressure. Largely static spending, when set against increasing demands and expectations, risks increasing systemic pressures, but in ways that are not always readily visible.

One of the complexities involved in understanding higher education sector finances is the need to unpick the relative contributions of public and private sources of investment, with significant variations across countries. In general, political systems that have favoured market solutions have appeared comfortable passing on the costs of higher education to individual students, using tuition fees as a form of systemic privatisation. While in particular contexts this may have appeared politically attractive to some governing parties (based on their political orientation), there is now growing evidence that the limits of such an approach have been reached. Falling living standards, exacerbated by high levels of inflation, have resulted in rising tuition fees accruing political costs, hence the pressure to freeze further fee increases. In these cases, the falling cost of tuition fees in real terms can have a direct negative impact on HEIs as individual institutions are caught in a double bind by governments reluctant to invest the necessary public funds, but also unwilling to countenance politically unpopular increases in tuition costs.

It is also important to recognise that in almost all countries private investment in HEI-based research and development exceeds public investment and that differences have increased as public investment has remained static, while over the same time period private sector investment has grown (Garritzmann, 2024). This represents a sector shift towards research activity driven by the private sector. This may be a general concern, but can represent a particular problem in areas such as the development and regulation of Artificial Intelligence.

In general, it is clear that the overall picture of higher education funding remains an exceptionally difficult one. There has been some growth in some countries, but several

factors work to diminish the real value of any increases. In some cases, growth in public investment is offset by declining private funding (mostly due to the declining value of tuition income), while high inflation and rising demands placed on the sector further exacerbate the gap between available and required resources. What also appears clearly is that higher education struggles to compete for public investment when set against other demands for investment. In the years since the global financial crisis of 2007/8 public investment has been typically tight everywhere with governments prioritising issues with high political capital (such as health care) or having to allocate resources to budget heads that are 'demand-driven' and so are difficult to control (for example, social security). Against this background, investment in education has often suffered disproportionately, with higher education impacted in particular.

Trade union responses:

Funding and investment issues are foundational to securing so many of the objectives demanded by higher education workers, and so union campaigns for improved funding are often integrated into more focused campaigns on specific issues, including pay and working conditions. However, what is clear is that the long shadow of the global financial crisis of 2007/8, which has been experienced as many years of austerity, has been experienced with renewed intensity after the pandemic and recent inflationary shocks, and so many unions have engaged in high profile campaigns to secure additional investment. There are too many campaigns to itemise, but some examples illustrate the issues:

In Argentina funding for universities was devastated by deep cuts in spending, combined with chronic rates of inflation in the national economy – eroding further the already inadequate value of existing investment. Argentina's higher education union, the Federación Nacional de Docentes Universitarios (CONADU) led the campaign against the cuts, and in support of increased funding. This was visible on 23 April 2024 when CONADU mobilised a national strike that unified higher education workers with their students and wider social and labour movement allies. In Buenos Aires 800,000 protestors marched in the city, despite intimidation by the government. The following month, on 9 May, Argentina's main trade union confederations called for a national strike and protest to challenge the austerity measures of the Milei Presidency. The campaign against funding cuts, and in defence of higher education, remains on-going.

CASE STUDY: defending public education and challenging underfunding – the *University Academic Staff Union* (UASU, Kenya).

The higher education system in Kenya is facing significant challenges. There is insufficient capitation for higher education institutions, and inadequate support for students. The lack of adequate financial support for students is particularly impacting students from low-income households, which in turn leads to under-enrolment and job cuts. There have recently been declarations of redundancies and this has emerged as a major issue in the country's leading university.

In the opinion of **Grace Nyongesa**, the National Chair of the *University Academic Staff Union* (UASU), the cuts in funding cannot be divorced from wider efforts to encourage privatisation and commercialisation of the higher education sector. The union has for some time been resisting efforts to contract out key parts of Kenya's HE system to private providers, with severe potential consequences for the job security and working conditions of UASU members.

The union has mounted a high profile and successful campaign to challenge the proposals for privatisation. UASU convened a prominent conference to address the issue, and this involved a wide range of stakeholders. The union also drew on research findings and reports, several of which had been generated from the research expertise of UASU members. Additionally, the campaign made direct links to Education International's '*Go Public! Fund Education*' initiative. Alongside all these activities the union campaigned among its own membership to educate them about the issues, and to prepare them for the possibility of industrial action should it be required.

All of these initiatives paid dividends when the Cabinet Secretary for Education announced that privatisation proposals had been withdrawn.

However, the union has to continue to be vigilant as the government is now proposing university mergers as a way to cut spending. This will not only impact jobs in the HE sector, but it will reduce access to higher education for many poorer students who live in areas that may lose their local university as the merger programme is clearly a plan for contraction. At the moment the union is challenging these developments through parliamentary lobbying, but the campaign is on-going and may need to be escalated.

Ms Nyongesa attributed the union's success to a number of factors. She highlighted the union's strong collective leadership that works hard to engage with, and educate, members. This builds trust with the membership and ensures that membership support for union action is always strong – '*we know when to lobby, and we know when to withdraw our labour – we know when to do the right things*'.

Privatisation and commercialisation in higher education

Issues of public, and private funding, open up wider questions about privatisation and commercialisation trends in higher education. These issues were not addressed directly in the *1997 Recommendation*, in part reflecting an environment in which the dominance of public provision was largely assumed. For example, working in higher education was clearly identified as 'a form of public service' (UNESCO, 1997, p. 6), underpinned by public service values and with a commitment to meeting societal and community goals. Moreover, there was also a clear recognition of the importance of public funding as a form of public investment (i.e. for the public good) and the need for democratic accountability to the public in relation to funds invested and activities undertaken. In this sense the *1997 Recommendation* reflects a deep commitment to public provision, and public service, articulated in a way that can be considered widely shared at the time. However, since that period there is no doubt that the situation has become more complex as private actors, and private investment, have assumed increased significance in higher education in many parts of the world. This inevitably impacts the nature, shape and aims of the sector in multiple ways, some of which are not always clear or obvious.

The role of private funding indicated above is an obvious illustration of privatisation and commercialisation trends in the higher education sector. This phenomenon is manifested in different ways, including but not limited to the expansion of private higher education institutions, partnerships with private actors for educational provision and the private funding of research (e.g. Hancock, 2020; Williamson & Hogan, 2021). In an earlier report investigating public and private investment in education across Europe (Stevenson et al., 2017), it was demonstrated that it was in higher education where education services were most vulnerable to privatisation. These trends, that were initially established in the period following the global financial crisis, have accelerated in the period during and after the pandemic.

Economic pressures, and the dominance of economic thinking that encourages private sector investment as a substitute for public sector funding continue to exert a significant influence on policy makers and those shaping the global higher education landscape. However, although there are clear areas where private investment continues to outstrip public spending (most obviously in relation to research and development investment), there is also evidence that reliance on private sector funding through tuition fees has reached its limits, certainly in current economic conditions.

Research by Williamson and Hogan (2021) demonstrated that during the COVID-19 pandemic private actors and commercial organisations strengthened their presence in higher education, providing consultancy and digital services including: access to education platforms and learning management systems, the infrastructure for *massive open online courses* (MOOC) and cloud system services (Williamson & Hogan, 2021).

In relation to the increasing role of private providers of edtech services, two key features are important to identify. First, is the 'shape' of the edtech market, which is dominated by a small number of global private companies. It is the case that this market can generate a large number of smaller 'start-up' companies, but many of these companies either fail to develop, or become quickly amalgamated into larger enterprises. Although the market can appear diverse and dynamic, it is essential to recognise the tremendous market power and influence of the big global edtech companies

(i.e. the high concentration ratio in the sector). Second is the pace and scale of 'market growth', which was expanding significantly but which accelerated at an extraordinary pace during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to one government report, the COVID-19 pandemic 'created unforeseen opportunities with regard to digital technology' in education (DfE, 2022, p. 9) with the same report suggesting a 72% growth in the market in 2020, as educational institutions had to pivot to remote learning. The overall education 'market' is estimated to be worth $10 trillion in 2030, with over $100 billion of that accounted for by edtech. Within that figure, it is estimated that the spending on Artificial Intelligence in education will be worth $21 billion by 2028 (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Privatisation threats in the international higher education system cannot be reduced only to the increasing role played by global edtech companies. However, since the pandemic, this has arguably emerged as the principal area of private sector growth within higher education systems. This is likely to continue apace with obvious implications for many areas of higher education activity, including academic freedom, the nature of academic labour and wider issues of institutional and system governance. These are not issues that can be treated as discrete, but they must be considered as interdependent.

Trade union responses:

CASE STUDY: challenging underfunding and the drive to commercialisation in Fiji – the *Association of the University of the South Pacific Staff* (AUSPS, Fiji)

The University of the South Pacific was founded in 1968 and is owned by 12 countries across the Region. The university also receives support from the governments of Australia and New Zealand. All 14 countries are represented on the university's Council.

The university has made a strategic decision to drive down costs by prioritising the development of online learning. In the past, scholarships have been available to allow students in the region to come to Fiji to study, but the scholarships are being cut, reducing student numbers and university revenue. The university's response has been to pivot to online learning.

Full time contracts are being replaced by associate staff who are undertaking online classes. Many of them are based in countries at considerable distance from the students. They are only paid to deliver online teaching, and at rates that work out at approximately 30% of the equivalent cost of full time staff, who carry many more responsibilities. The university has devolved budgets within the institution, so if departments do not generate sufficient revenue they are forced to cut costs. This further drives the shift towards outsourced, and casualised, labour.

The union has raised serious concerns about these developments - in relation to both staff working conditions and the quality of student experience. Technological infrastructure in the region is not good. Student access, and the quality of student experience will be diminished if students are dependent on poor technological infrastructure. It is feared that students who need access to high quality education the most, will have the worst access. **Rosalia Fatiaki**, the General Secretary of AUSPS, highlights the union's concerns:

> *We do not have the infrastructure to cater for the needs of the students to effectively deliver these courses online. This affects the quality of education to our region. Are we preparing the students well to go out as graduates of the university and serve their countries? This is the question we have put to the university.*

Staff concerns relate to job security, but also working conditions as the workload shared across academic staff is carried out by a smaller pool of staff.

The union has lobbied the University Council relentlessly, and raised concerns about the impacts on both staff and students. The union has also worked with others to raise their grievances. In October 2024 the union took the unprecedented step of striking for four days to register concerns about university leadership and governance. Specifically, the union called for the removal of the vice-chancellor, and although this was not achieved, the university council did respond positively to many of the issues raised by the union.

CASE STUDY: Multi-union campaigns for Public Education in Central and South America.

In many cases the campaigns against privatisation and commercialisation in the higher education sector are rooted in broad based campaigns that make the positive case for education as a public good, and specifically the case for HEIs as public institutions that are central to democracy and a strong civil society. In Central and South America education trade unions have come together to generate a powerful voice for public education, and the need to strengthen education systems, including higher education, with public investment. Much of this campaign has built on Education International's global campaign for public education Go Public! Fund Education.

For example, the regional launch of this campaign took place on 9 December 2024 at a public hearing at the Federal Senate in Brasilia in which the value and values of public education were the central theme. A little time earlier, on 29 and 30 October, education trade unions had met at a Global Education Seminar that was organised to immediately precede the G20 Leaders' Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The seminar was hosted by Brazilian education trade unions including the union representing higher education workers, PROIFES. The seminar brought together a range of organisations from across the Latin American region to make a powerful statement in support of public education, framing a narrative that highlighted the critical importance of public ownership and control of all sectors of education.

One practical outcome of the Seminar was the 'Fortaleza Charter' that was signed at the seminar by 85 separate organisations, and which was presented to leaders at the G20 summit. The Charter is described as a manifesto and 'call for commitment' for public education, and for appreciation of public education professionals. The Charter recognises the significance of the United Nations Secretary General's High Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, and the need to make the Panel's 59 recommendations a practical reality. To this end, the Fortaleza Charter urged G20 leaders to take action in four key areas:

- Valuing education professionals
- Investment in educational infrastructure
- Inclusive and democratic education
- People-centred technologies

The value of such initiatives highlights the importance of broad-based campaigns that work within, and across national borders. Substantial initiatives, supported by a broad range of partners, are able to make interventions in a diverse range of fora, from international summits of world leaders, to more local and even institution level interventions. The aim is to shift debate, and the framing of popular narratives, to highlight the importance of public education.

Salaries, remuneration and pensions

Paragraphs 57 to 64 of the *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* all relate, directly or indirectly, to the need for remuneration packages that are competitive when set against other comparable occupations, and which can be considered essential for higher education personnel to carry out their work roles appropriately.

> *All financially feasible measures should be taken to provide higher-education teaching personnel with remuneration such that they can devote themselves satisfactorily to their duties and allocate the necessary amount of time for the continuing training and periodic renewal of knowledge and skills that are essential at this level of teaching. (para 57)*

This commitment is reaffirmed in the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession*, which also reinforces a focus on gender-equity with regards to salaries and pay (ILO, 2024, para 36 p. 9).

Collecting reliable comparative data about the salaries and remuneration packages of higher education workers is notoriously difficult. There is generally a lack of such data, and where data exists it frequently reflects inequalities that are embedded deep within the global education system. The OECD for example focuses its interest almost exclusively on the school sector, while any data representing countries of the Global South is extremely scarce. The World Bank has shown an interest in looking at working conditions in low and middle income countries, but again, the focus is on the school sector (Evans & Yuan, 2018).

Based on identifying data from individual nations it is clear that higher education salaries have been sharply impacted by wider contextual conditions that have often eroded the real value of earnings. Of those, the more significant have been the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent spike in inflation rates. The pandemic led to considerable economic instability and this was often associated with salary/benefit reductions or freezes across higher education systems. Meanwhile, the increasing inflation rates in recent years have impacted the relative value of academics' salaries (AAUP, 2023; Ogden, 2023). As the cited reports note, this erosion of real terms pay is feeding into recruitment problems, in particular in disciplines and fields where private sector pay is much more attractive.

Research has also focused on the gender pay gap in academia. The INOMICS (2022) report focusing on male and female academics in a single discipline globally, found a 27.8% pay disparity between male and female academics worldwide. This is also supported by Colby and Bai (2023), who found that pay differences exist across all ranks in the United States but are particularly evident in the professor rank, with female academics receiving on average 14% lower salaries than their male colleagues. This difference is greater than an earlier study across African HEIs, although this still indicated an 8% gender pay gap at the professorial level (based on an analysis of data from the Association of Commonwealth Universities – see Makoni, 2018). Contributing to the pay gap, research also indicates that female academics are underrepresented in the higher academic ranks, indicating that women have less access to senior roles, and are less well paid when they acquire such positions (AAUP, 2023; Brower & James, 2020; Colby & Bai, 2023; Ogden, 2023).

A nationwide study covering approximately 6,000 academics conducted in New Zealand argues that the gender pay gap in the country is significant, with males receiving higher salaries and experiencing higher rates of promotion and pay rises. The researchers assert that even accounting for the academics' research score, subject area and age, these factors explain less than half of the identified gender pay gap (Brower & James, 2020).

Similarly, in the UK, although the gender pay gap in academia is generally lower than in other sectors, it still remains at 13.7%. In the United States, the pay for women academics in all ranks is lower (on average 17.7%) than their male counterparts (AAUP, 2023). The differentiation becomes more pronounced in the STEM disciplines (Samaniego et al., 2023).

Finally, it is important to note that pay inequalities relating to gender must be considered relatively well researched when compared to inequalities across other characteristics, and building the evidence base in these areas needs to be recognised as an essential and pressing next step in tackling pay inequalities more widely.

Trade union responses:

In this study, several trade unions indicated that they had been able to make significant progress in relation to salaries, maintaining and sometimes increasing the real value of members' pay. For example, colleagues from the *Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (SNESUP) in Morocco commented:

> *After negotiations with the Moroccan government and mobilisation, our union was able to secure a 20% salary increase in 2023 for all research teachers [enseignants-chercheurs], followed by the change of the special status of higher education research teachers.*

Similarly, the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajodores de la Educación* (SNTE) in Mexico indicated it had been able to secure above-inflation pay raises for members, while colleagues from the *Syndicat Unitaire et Démocratique des Enseignants du Sénégal* (SUDES) and the *Teachers' Union of Serbia* (TUS) reported that they had been able to make good progress in pay negotiations.

In New Zealand, the *Tertiary Education Union* (TEU) engaged in a successful campaign of strike action, winning a pay raise for members, and significantly increasing union membership. TEU officials commented:

> *In 2022 we ran a major campaign with members at all eight New Zealand universities achieving nationwide media coverage, public support, a nationwide strike at the universities, and lifting all wage offers from around 2 per cent to settlements averaging at 4 per cent. Some members because of changes in internal salary scales won 12 per cent pay raises. The action also created a 10 per cent growth in membership.*

CASE STUDY: Winning on Pensions - the *University and College Union* (UCU, UK)

In 2018, workers in the UK's older universities (those that pre-dated the creation of a range of 'new universities' in 1992) were shocked when the employers sought to impose massive cuts to the sector's pension scheme, transforming it from a system based on guaranteed benefits into a system where benefits would depend on the value (and volatility) of market investments. UCU members balloted for industrial action and immediately commenced a sustained period of strike action, taking 14 days of national action over four weeks. The action was well supported by members, and students, and employers were unprepared for the reaction. Consequently, employers were forced to retreat on their plans and the union reached a deal that avoided any serious system changes until a full review of the scheme was undertaken by independent experts. The 2018 industrial action was undoubtedly a victory, but it only secured a reprieve and did not remove the threat of any future changes.

As it transpired, in 2022, the employers continued to press for changes to the pension scheme that would worsen terms for UCU members. These changes were not as dramatic as those presented in 2018, but the 2022 changes still threatened a 35% cut in benefits. UCU continued its campaign of industrial action, now running the campaign alongside a second dispute focused on pay, workload, pay inequalities and precarious working (the so-called 'four fights' dispute). This campaign was sustained despite the tremendous obstacles imposed by new government laws requiring regular re-ballots of members and the need to meet high ballot thresholds.

In December 2023, it was confirmed that the proposed cuts to pensions would be restored in full from April 2024, and that funds would be committed to avoid any losses incurred between 2022 and 2024. This outcome followed relentless campaigning, 69 days of strike action between 2018 and 2023 and the use of marking and assessment boycotts to increase the pressure on employers.

It did not prove possible to secure a breakthrough in the 'four fights' dispute, but in relation to pensions, the victory must be considered dramatic and historic. UCU General Secretary **Jo Grady** stated '*This is a momentous day, not just for our members, but for workers everywhere. After taking 69 days of strike action in a five-year battle to defend our pensions, we have won and within months university staff will see the UK's largest private pension scheme fully restore our pensions*'.

Job (in)security and precarity

Paragraphs 45 and 46 of the *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* (UNESCO, 1997) are focused explicitly on ensuring security of employment and the linked issues of tenure and job security. Paragraph 46 states clearly:

> *Security of employment in the profession, including tenure or its functional equivalent, where applicable, should be safeguarded as it is essential to the interests of higher education as well as those of higher-education teaching personnel. (UNESCO, 1997, para 46)*

This statement is significant because it recognises that secure employment is central to ensuring quality provision within higher education systems, and is not only a matter of ensuring decent employment conditions for staff. Working conditions and learning conditions are inextricably linked.

This commitment is reiterated in *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* that refers to the need for secure employment and decent working conditions capable of recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified personnel.

Education International's *Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021* (Thompson, 2021) highlighted the enduring problem of precarious working in the general education sector but noted that the problem was at its most acute in the higher education sector. This report identified that 17.2% of staff were employed on casualised contracts in the higher education sector (ibid, p. 29), further noting that the previous *Global Status Report* in 2018 argued the 'shift to a more precarious form of employment as an effect of creeping privatisation' (ibid. p. 30).

There is no doubt that precarity continues to be a major problem in the higher education

sector, but there is some evidence that the figures indicated above may understate the scale of the problem. COVID-19 was clearly having an impact at the time of the 2021 report, but this research was conducted in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic remained in its early stages, and indications suggest the pandemic's impact on the higher education labour market worsened as the prevalence of COVID-19 continued long into 2021 (with legacy impacts extending beyond 2021). Other crises highlighted in this report have further contributed to sector uncertainty, which in turn is reflected in the increased use of fixed-term and casual contracts. Most obvious is the 'pincer movement' effect of reduced public funding, and increasing dependency on highly volatile student recruitment (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023).

Evidence that the *Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021* may understate the current problem is provided by a recent report from the UK which indicated that 33% staff are employed on fixed-term contracts. The proportion of 'research-only' staff on fixed-term contracts rises to 68%, while only 22% of respondents indicated their work was dependent on time-limited funding linked to discrete projects (Ogden, 2023). These figures suggest the prevalence of project-based funding (typically time limited) is not able to explain why fixed-term contracts are used as widely as they are. The same report also highlighted that the overwhelming majority of redundancies in higher education, experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, were among precarious workers in the sector.

Solomon and Du Plessis's (2023) systematic review of experiences of precarious work in the higher education sector highlighted many features of precarious working that are generally well understood, but that are confirmed by the broad range of research analysed by the authors. For example, research reaffirms that those in precarious work consistently face increased job insecurity, poorer employment benefits, limited scope for professional autonomy and collective bargaining and increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Solomon and Du Plessis's analysis also highlights the complex and intersecting ways in which structural inequalities are reproduced and reinforced by precarious working. Referring specifically to the experience of women they conclude:

Women are especially concentrated in the temporary, hourly paid, or pro-

rata and zero hours contracts; being sidelined, overlooked, and settling for precarious employment contracts often leads to loss of income and long-term pension insecurity; academic precarity is being feminized, which broadens structural inequality. (ibid, p. 12)

What much of this data illustrates is that the higher education sector has developed a culture of dependency on the use, misuse and frequent abuse of short-term and fixed contracts. Such contracts have always been a feature of the higher education labour market, in part because of the nature of research funding, but it is clear that the prevalence of such contracts exceeds anything that might be reasonably justified. Rather, what has become abundantly clear is that in many instances casualisation has become the default response to increased marketisation and the accompanying uncertainty in the sector. Managing fluctuations in activity by making increased use of temporary contracts has increasingly become the standard managerial response to uncertainty with a corresponding transfer of risk from the organisation to individual employees. Stevenson and Selechopoulou (2022) have argued that the widespread use of casualised contracts is now the means by which chronic problems in the higher education labour market are massaged and concealed. It is the case that HEIs do not *typically* face the problems of labour shortages that have reached crisis proportions in school systems across the world (although there are areas of labour shortage in several disciplines in the higher education sector, see Brantley & Shomaker, 2021). However, in part, the general problems are masked in higher education by the use of casual contracts on an epidemic scale. In both cases, there is a threat to the quality of provision that education systems are able to provide.

Trade union responses:

Despite the challenges, and the apparently relentless drive towards increased casualisation in the higher education sector, it is important to recognise that several trade unions have been able to make important progress in regularising more secure employment for those working in the sector.

In Mexico, in September 2020, the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (SNTE) secured an agreement with the

National Polytechnic Institute that impacted 6000 higher education sector workers. The agreement supported improved staff recruitment, prioritised teaching, provided staff with critical resources and provided increased opportunities for regularised work in an environment that has depended heavily on casualised contracts. SNTE General Secretary **Alfonso Cepeda Salas** commented '*in the aftermath of the pandemic it was essential for us to promote job stability which entails guaranteeing job security, salaries, benefits and rights*'. This focus in union campaigning has resulted in very substantial numbers of Mexican educators, across education sectors, being able to move from temporary contracts to securing their certificates of permanent employment.

Alongside the achievements of SNTE, several other unions were able to report progress in this area. For example, through collective bargaining colleagues in *Asociación Sindical de Profesores Universitarios* (ASPU) in Colombia were able to extend the length of temporary contracts and compel university authorities to establish plans to formalise teaching work. Similarly, the *Norwegian Association of Researchers* (NAR) and *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (GEW) in Germany were able to report legislative changes that will improve the position of precarious workers while *DM* in Denmark reports improvements in parental leave impacting temporary research workers as part of a new collective agreement across the public sector. Colleagues in the *National Tertiary Education Union* (NTEU) in Australia report visible shifts in the attitudes of employers and government towards casualised working, with acknowledgement by employers of a 'genuine problem'. The NTEU commented '*The fixed term progress was partially by negotiation and also public campaign, however, this campaign was broader than just our union and was economy-wide, we were able to piggyback on this broader movement against fixed term contracts*', demonstrating the value of linking anti-casualisation campaigns across occupational groups.

A further example is provided by the *Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers* (FUURT) who report significant progress in relation to employment status for doctoral researchers.

For a long time, we have advocated strongly towards better professional recognition of PhD researchers and that they would receive funding for the whole duration of the PhD research at once. In the recent couple of years, most universities have finally adopted the title "*PhD/doctoral researcher*" (instead of "student"), and the government of Finland has granted c. 250 million euros for a doctoral education pilot programme that will secure 1000 jobs/employment contracts for PhD researchers in universities for 3 years (2024-2027). In addition, other research funding organisations have started to give longer funding periods. Although research funding especially in early career stages still continues to be fragmented, we see a positive trend in the duration of research funding/employment getting longer (although still fixed-term) and our battle goes on!

Many unions continue to produce high-quality research reports that detail the extent, and consequences of, wide-scale precarious working. A recent report by the *Irish Federation of University Teachers* (IFUT, 2023) provides a good example. As one IFUT official commented, the report has become 'our guiding document on advancing discussions on job security in all institutions'.

Technology, digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

The *1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*, makes relatively few references to technology and its potential consequences (in the year of its initial publication WiFi standard 802.11 was only just released, and the term 'e-learning', for example, had not been used). Where there are references in the Recommendation these typically relate to ensuring higher-education personnel can access the necessary technologies, including access to the internet and relevant databases. These references clearly reflect the time when they were written and much has changed since. However, it is also important to recognise for many higher education personnel in particular parts of the world, reliable access to the internet, for example, still cannot be guaranteed. Against this background, digital inequalities in higher education that were becoming more significant at the turn of the millennium, have accelerated and grown since that time.

As might be expected, the recent *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on*

the Teaching Profession has a much sharper, and more nuanced focus on technology in educational contexts. In the report's foreword there is an exhortation to 'promote the use of digital technology to augment – but not replace – the critical human relationship that is the foundation of teaching' (p. ix), and the report also includes a substantial section devoted to discussing the need to develop, and understand, 'human centred education technology'. In this section of the report the panel calls for teachers to have autonomy and pedagogical choice in relation to the use of technology, be provided with appropriate professional development and data safeguards and asserts that '*Such tools should not become a substitute for teachers, but rather should empower teachers to guide their learners' quest for inquisitive, critical, creative and lifelong learning*' (p. 10).

As the High Level Panel's report recognises, the experience of using digital technologies in all sectors of education is now well established, and technology in its multiple forms can provide essential support to both teaching and research activities. Technological advances, many of them developed from research undertaken in universities and higher education research institutes, can often bring about significant improvements in provision, and perhaps for this reason, discussions about technology adoption and implementation treat the issues as unproblematic and approach them uncritically.

Several recent research studies highlight the complex nature of the relationship between the increased use of technologies, the impact on 'outcomes' (whether teaching or research) and the experiences of those engaged in higher education work, while noting that available research into the use of technologies in higher education typically lags far behind the application of such technologies (Marshall et al., 2024).

Potential benefits of the increased use of technologies are frequently linked to the possibilities for personalisation in learning and wider efficiencies that flow from improved management information systems and the automation of workflows. None of these areas are without contention. Moreover, research studies also highlight serious concerns about a wide range of issues. For example, questions of academic integrity have become more complex, for students and staff, and considerable resources are required

to respond and adapt to this changing environment. A recent example has been highlighted by a surge in AI generated 'fake science' articles that have appeared on Google Scholar (Haider et al., 2024). Academics have also raised concerns about growing digital inequalities (Kuhn et al., 2023). The period of the pandemic, and the global shift to forms of hybrid learning is acknowledged as a period when the development of blended forms of learning accelerated, but many aspects of this experience were contested by those working at the sharp end of these developments (Brown et al., 2022). Key concerns were a tendency towards increased standardisation in the teaching process, alongside separate but linked concerns relating to increased monitoring and surveillance, in turn leading to work intensification. For example, Selkrig et al.'s (2024) study of teaching through the pandemic illustrated how the increased use of technologies encouraged an institutional focus on consistency and standardisation, that conflicted with the need for those engaged in teaching to experience agency and a space for creative action. In a related vein, Arantes and Vicars (2024) argue that a shift to online and remote teaching has had a profoundly negative impact on work-life balance in higher education institutions, which in turn raises questions of system sustainability. Arantes and Vicars assert that new forms of technology-based work contribute to increased isolation, escalating job demands and expectations, and an overall sense of 'digital fatigue' that have profound effects on work-life balance and, ultimately, psycho-social health. New technologies risk blurring the traditional distinctions between work and home and drive a feeling of being 'always on standby' (p. 606) that the authors assert is unsustainable in the longer term.

In their report for Education International, Komljenovic and Williamson (2024) highlight issues relating to intellectual property (IP) ownership that have always been complex in a higher education context, but these complexities are being compounded by the use of technology as the 'ownership debate' is no longer restricted to the higher education institution and the employee, but now also potentially includes the edtech platform. The issues raised echo concerns highlighted in the *1997 Recommendation* that '*the intellectual property of higher education personnel should benefit from appropriate legal protection*' (UNESCO 1997, para 12).

Komljenovic and Williamson differentiate IP issues between those relating to academic content and user data. In relation to academic content the authors are clear that '*platform owners do not typically claim ownership of academic content posted to an online service*' (ibid. p. 2), however, there are potential problems if rules and protocols are changed at some future point, with potential negative consequences for academic staff. Maintaining an understanding of current policies and protocols can be difficult enough, without having to be vigilant about possible future changes. These problems are exacerbated if the higher education institution owns the IP to content posted on a digital site. Such content does have a potential value that can be monetised, with the benefits accruing to the institution, but not to the creator of the content.

The complexity of these issues can be even more opaque in relation to issues of IP and user data. By their nature, edtech platforms collect vast quantities of user data, much of which has significant value. The terms on which data is collected, stored and used are generally set out in complex contracts and legal arrangements between the platform company and the institution purchasing the technology. Komljenovic and Williamson assert that the nature of these arrangements can make it very difficult for individuals (staff or students) to establish how their data is collected or processed, with the potential of such datafication being exploited commercially (in relation to product development, etc).

Komljenovic and Williamson also raise several concerns about the multiple ways in which technology can impact academic freedom, most particularly in relation to teaching. ILO/UNESCO and UNESCO *Recommendations* from 1966 and 1997 highlight the importance of professional autonomy in relation to teaching and the need for a teacher to be able to make appropriate professional judgements in relation to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This type of professional autonomy is a key feature of academic freedom, but it is potentially constrained by edtech platforms that frequently provide a template within which teaching content, including assessment, must fit. Typically, academics have little or no say over decisions relating to the procurement of edtech platforms, and so decisions about issues that can have a profound impact on how higher education workers approach their work

are generally out of their hands. Moreover, commitments to using particular platforms involve high investment costs and long contracts. This can make quitting the contract unattractive and hence institutions become locked into working with the same platforms. As the platforms change and develop, possibly in ways deemed deleterious by academics, individual workers have no option but to work within the changing system. In such an unusual market, individual academics have no market power (the institution is the consumer), but even in this context, the danger is that market power shifts to the producer whose ability to shape product development begins to define (and constrain) teaching activity.

Kissoon and Karran (2024) have also highlighted links between the increased use of new technologies and academic freedom, arguing that digital technologies have become essential to the new managerialism in higher education that depend heavily on target-setting, bench-marking and output measurement as a means of asserting increased control over academic labour. They argue '*continuous real-time performance monitoring and the assessment of academic staff from multiple angles at scale is only made possible through the use of digital technologies*' (ibid, p. 20).

Komljenovic and Williamson, summarise the issues in the following terms:

> *The introduction of edtech platforms into universities shapes new kinds of practices, which may become normalised, though often without democratic discussion or scrutiny within the sector. This raises the risk that academic IP may be exploited, and academic freedom constrained by HE institutions, edtech companies, or both, as digital platforms occupy an increasing role in HE systems.*

All of the issues above are not only amplified and accelerated by the development of Artificial Intelligence but also assume new forms, with a real risk that the development and adoption of AI at scale threatens to further wrestle higher education away from the values of public higher education. There is no doubt that many edtech companies recognise these developments as an enormous business opportunity – with tech company Intel claiming a technological 'revolution' with AI being '*integrated into*

all aspects of higher education—teaching, learning, researching, and administrative tasks' (intel online, n.d.).

AI is already being widely used in some higher education contexts, and there can be multiple benefits that allow workers to complete tasks more efficiently, but the dangers lie in business-driven institutions seeing technology as a relatively low-cost way to replace labour, and to alter the labour:capital ratio in ways that prioritises economies from labour substitution over quality education.

Trade union responses:

Higher education trade unions recognise the potential dangers arising from the uncritical adoption of AI into the sector. As one official of the **National Education Association** (NEA) (USA) commented '*The technology has the potential to drastically change every aspect of our lives. In the higher education space, this affects both teaching and scholarship/research for both faculty and students*'. In summary, no one will be unaffected by these developments with real risks of labour in higher education institutions becoming increasingly 'taylorised' as simplistic principles of scientific management (Taylor, 1911) drive widespread deskilling, labour substitution and the crude use of metrics and algorithms to determine the nature of academic work.

Within the survey conducted for this report, 30% of respondents indicated AI had emerged as a serious issue for members since 2021, with 55% of respondents making the same point about the impact of online learning (in part reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also highlighting long-term trends). Looking to the future, AI was identified by survey respondents as one of the most significant challenges facing higher education unions.

However, in terms of specific trade union responses to developments around technology, examples were more limited. This reflects a context in which the whole area, as a focus for collective bargaining, remains relatively new, can be extraordinarily complex and is moving at a very fast pace. This study highlighted some examples of trade unions bargaining for access to better technology (such as provision of laptops to staff), and Stevenson et al.'s (2020) research demonstrated that during the pandemic, in

a relatively small number of cases, education trade unions were able to bargain over the use of technology (mostly in relation to health and safety issues such as screen time). There are also examples of education trade unions, including Education International, commissioning valuable research on important aspects of technology development, often focusing on open sourcing, intellectual property rights, academic freedom and governance, as well as potential impacts on work and labour. This is essential work as it is clear the issues are complex, and the concerns of staff in the workplace are not adequately addressed by studies commissioned by governments or employer organisations. Building up a research-based understanding of these complex issues is clearly critical if trade unions are going to be able to make effective interventions in relevant areas. However, it is also clear that there is much work to be done if the outcomes from these research studies are to be translated into relevant and practical bargaining demands. One example of a union that is adopting a pro-active response to these issues is the American Federation of Teachers.

CASE STUDY: Negotiating on technology and Artificial Intelligence - the *American Federation of Teachers* (AFT, USA).

The AFT has established two Task Force groups to look at the growing implications of Artificial Intelligence use in the education sector. An initial group was established that looked at AI issues across the whole sector (K-12 to higher education), and in 2024 it published a report that set out 'common sense guardrails' for using advanced technology in educational institutions (AFT, 2024). However, it was recognised that many issues relating to AI use have specific implications in higher education (such as those relating to intellectual property), hence the establishment of a second Task Force, focused only on HE.

It is envisaged that the HE focused Task Force will produce a document similar to AFT's guardrail publication but highlighting specific HE concerns. For example, the group is keen to ensure that AI is a staple issue on collective bargaining agendas and it is committed to developing sample contract language that can be shared across union Locals in different institutions. However, the group is also concerned to ensure that AI issues are part of the wider shared governance agenda in higher education institutions.

Eric Rader, co-chair of AFT's Higher Education Program and Policy Council, argues.

> *The union has to be involved in this. It can't be just the administration making decisions and faculty having to follow them. There must be union involvement – whether it is negotiating new language in a contract, or through shared governance.*

AFT has particular concerns around access and equity issues relating to the use of AI, and for example, the potential role of AI to be involved in decisions about job appointments or tenure. The union is working to ensure that AI is not used in these processes, and furthermore, that the rights of contingent staff are protected, and not undermined further, by the use of AI.

Another area of concern highlighted by the AFT group is the importance of involving faculty in decisions about IT infrastructure purchase and procurement – recognising the need to be involved in decision-making at an early stage of the process. Technology purchase decisions have major implications for how teaching, research and administration are undertaken, and can lock organisations into long term commitments. Hence the need for faculty, through their unions, to be involved in these decisions at a time when they can have meaningful influence.

In all this work Rader emphasises that AFT's guiding principle is that AI must be used to augment work, not replace workers.

> *Both task forces, in all the work they have been doing, emphasise that AI should be used to supplement human work. It is the human being who is at the centre of what we're doing - not the AI tool. Certainly there are a lot of productive ways to use AI, but it should not be used as a way to replace workers.*

The work of the Task Force is on-going. It highlights the importance of adopting a proactive and strategic response to issues of Artificial Intelligence, and in particular, the need to embed trade union involvement in decision-making and negotiations.

Collegial governance, academic freedom and social dialogue

At the heart of the *1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* is a recognition of the contribution that HEIs make to establishing democratic spaces in the public polity. These can be considered central to securing and maintaining robust democratic cultures in political and civil society. The key themes of democracy and academic freedom run throughout the 1997 Recommendation, for example:

- **Paras 17-21: Institutional autonomy** – referring to the importance of the appropriate degree of self-governance commensurate with higher education institutions performing their role in relation to academic work and standards. Institutional autonomy can be considered the '*institutional form of academic freedom and a necessary pre-condition to guarantee the proper fulfilment of the functions entrusted to higher education teaching personnel and institutions*' (para. 18).

- **Paras 25-30: Individual rights and academic freedom** – setting out in detail the importance of protecting academic freedom in relation to both teaching and research. The *Recommendation* states that '*all higher education teaching personnel should enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association as well as the right to liberty and security of the person and liberty of movement*' (para. 26).

- **Paras 31-32: Self-governance and collegiality** – making clear the need to ensure higher education teaching personnel have the right to participate in the governance of their institution, and the right to elect a majority of representatives to academic bodies. The *Recommendation* makes clear that '*Collegial decision-making should encompass decisions regarding the administration and determination of policies of higher education, curricula, research, extension work, the allocation of resources and other related activities, in order to improve academic excellence and quality for the benefit of society at large*' (para. 32).

In turn, these themes are echoed in the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, which places a particular emphasis on the importance of collective bargaining and social dialogue.

In this report we address these issues through the following headings:

- Academic freedom
- Collegial governance and institutional autonomy
- Collective bargaining and social dialogue

Academic freedom

Academic freedom may be characterised as one of the most fundamental liberties and therefore, it is always being challenged somewhere and must be constantly protected everywhere. Limits on academic freedom have often been associated with contexts where democratic rights are restricted and governments are not subject to democratic recall. However, at the current time, it is clear that challenges to academic freedom are becoming much more common in contexts that are notionally democratic, but where governments are acting in increasingly authoritarian ways. In a world where post-truth politics and manufactured 'culture wars' have become more prevalent, academics and scholars find themselves increasingly challenged in ways intended to close down academic debate and proper scholarly activity.

In Argentina, higher education funding has been maintained at 2023 levels, despite inflation eroding the real value of spending by 80%, thereby threatening the continued operation of many HEIs (BBC, 2024). According to the BBC, the Presidency of Javier Milei has intentionally used these financial cuts to curtail scholarly activity by seeking '*to justify the [budget] cuts by calling universities centres of socialist indoctrination*' (BBC, 2024). This is, of course, a strategy that has been replicated in the USA with university budgets threatened unless institutions comply with Federal government pronouncements. Alongside the cuts in institutional budgets in Argentina there has been a direct attack on critical thinking, ideological pluralism and dissent, with those involved in street protests against the cuts being detained, and sometimes being accused of terrorism and participation in a coup d'état. Inevitably higher education institutions find

themselves at the sharp end of this ideological attack on free thinking.

Developments in Argentina exemplify the growing threats that emerge from the rise in authoritarian populism, in which authorities seek to close down debate on issues that are presented as a challenge to government orthodoxy.

Similar experiences are evident in many other contexts, including in Türkiye, where academics continue to experience persecution and intimidation. This increased dramatically after the 2016 coup attempt (when 7,312 higher education workers were removed from public office) but continues and is ongoing today. Efforts to challenge the dismissal of 406 signatories to a peace petition (Scholars at Risk Network, n. d.) in the Constitutional Court were in part successful – with the Court recognising that signing the petition was a legitimate act of 'freedom of thought and expression'. However, state authorities continue to overrule the decision of the court and efforts to secure the reinstatement of those dismissed remain unsuccessful. In some cases, these efforts to secure reinstatement were resisted by the institutions where academics that were dismissed might have been able to resume their work. In a report to the **European Trade Union Committee for Education** (ETUCE) *Eğitim Sen*, the Turkish Education and Science Labourers Union, stated, '*We will fight with all our strength until all our members who were unjustly and unlawfully dismissed are reinstated*.' More recently, in March 2025, the entire Executive Board of *Eğitim Sen* was placed under house arrest following industrial action by union members in support of democratic rights in the country, including the defence of academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of universities.

In other parts of the world, the issues can look different, but they are often driven by the same political forces and trends. Many of these forces seek to identify issues that divide communities, commonly around the rights and status of minoritised groups including migrants. In some contexts, these deliberately manufactured conflicts have been portrayed as 'culture wars' that have in turn been used to undermine academic freedom and free speech. For example, in the first six months of the 2022-23 academic year 1,477 books were banned in public schools in the United States (an increase of 28% on the previous six months) (Meehan et al., 2023). Although

this is a problem that has been associated with public schools, it is also one that is having a deep impact on higher education, where Meehan et al. report that 39% of Bills that seek to proscribe the teaching of specific topics include higher education (see summary by Fugger, 2022). In some cases, these state-sponsored attacks on academic freedom are coupled with populist efforts to mobilise students against academics in initiatives that explicitly intend to intimidate (for example Turning Point USA's 'Professor Watchlist', which is an online platform that encourages students to report so-called 'radical professors').

It is also important to note that threats to academic freedom do not always assume the form of open and direct attacks on the rights of academics, but often emerge in less visible manifestations. Funding allocations (BBC, 2024), the abuse of precarious contracts (Rea, 2021) and the increased (mis)use of technology (Kissoon & Karran, 2024) all offer examples of how academic freedom is being curtailed in often opaque ways.

Collegial governance and institutional autonomy

Issues relating to collegial governance and institutional autonomy continue to be a significant concern for EI member organisations with 65% identifying these as important issues for their members and organisation in the period since 2021. Many of the issues represent a continuation, and continued deterioration, of problems that have been highlighted in previous allegations presented to CEART. At the centre of these concerns is the conviction that a deepening managerialism is progressively supplanting democratic structures and collegial governance in higher education institutions. These trends have been well established for some time, but it now appears that the situation is being exacerbated by the 'context of crises' within which higher education institutions have to function. The impact of multiple colliding crises is driving a claimed need for rapid decision-making and 'agile management'. Such an approach to decision-making is presented as incompatible with collegial forms of governance (Stevenson & Selechopoulou, 2022). Consequently, there is continued evidence of a downgrading of democratic forms of governance where key decisions are made by members of the academic community who are elected by their peers.

These issues were comprehensively summarised by an official from the *Fédération Québécoise des Professeures et Professeurs d'Université* (Quebec, Canada) in a survey response:

> *The collegial governance of universities is an increasingly important problem in all our institutions and the situation is getting worse and worse. The general trend (supported by the policies of the different levels of government) is to increasingly restrict the spaces for collegial deliberation through which colleagues still have little power in favour of a managerial mode of management which centralises and verticalises relationships. This problem is amplified by the work overload of colleagues who no longer have the time to invest in the little space for collegial governance that remains.*

Collective bargaining and social dialogue

Concerns about unsatisfactory collective bargaining and social dialogue arrangements were identified by a significant proportion of survey respondents (42.5%).

The rise in authoritarianism and authoritarian governments has impacted labour relations in many countries with several unions indicating that governments were unwilling to engage in collective bargaining in the higher education sector, for example in Türkiye and Argentina. In many cases, these are actions that layer over developments during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in which governments and employers bypassed established procedures for securing collective agreements. Stevenson et al.'s (2020) study of education unions across Europe, demonstrated that in very many countries collective bargaining and social dialogue arrangements were negatively impacted by governments' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to note that this was not the experience everywhere and, in some contexts, there was an increase in social dialogue as governments and employers recognised the benefits of working with unions to address serious problems. In these cases, collective bargaining was not seen as an impediment to acting decisively to respond to the public health crisis, but rather as a means of securing better collective decision-making and improved outcomes.

What is clear, however, is that social dialogue is inadequate and fragile in the higher education sector in many countries, and that it is often vulnerable to challenges, whether that be direct confrontations with trade unions, or the less visible, but equally problematic issue of established industrial relations procedures being sidelined, and trade unions being marginalised. This stands in stark contrast to the expectations of the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession*, that accorded a high priority to the importance of robust systems of social dialogue.

Trade union responses:

Despite many difficulties, several Education International (EI) member organisations were able to report progress in the area of academic freedom. For example, union colleagues in Quebec participated in a parliamentary commission on a Bill concerning academic freedom. In an alliance with other organisations, it was possible to improve the Bill. Unions were also successful in incorporating a new clause in 2022 into the collective agreement of post-secondary institutions that protects freedom of expression and academic freedom. Recognising the extent to which issues of academic freedom, collegial governance collective bargaining have become increasingly important in recent times, here we present no less than four different case studies, from the Philippines, Canada, Ireland and Zimbabwe all of which focus on different aspects of the campaign to defend academic freedom, collegial governance and collective bargaining/ social dialogue. The cases studies highlight the importance, and effectiveness, of trade union organisation in the campaign to defend these valuable rights. However, in all these cases, respondents indicated significant problems remain and vigilance must be maintained.

CASE STUDY: Promoting academic freedom in the Philippines - *Alliance of Concerned Teachers* (ACT, Philippines).

Higher education in the Philippines has experienced many difficult times when academic freedom has been undermined, and academics have experienced intimidation and victimisation for undertaking their scholarly work. In the relatively recent past the Philippines have experienced extended periods of martial law, and attacks on human rights prior to, and during, the period of the Duterte Presidency.

After the end of the initial period of martial law the union had been able to work with others to establish new regulations that prevented military personnel and the police from entering university campuses. However, one of the early actions of the Duterte era was to unilaterally dismantle these accords and to reintroduce the risk of militarised actions in higher education institutions. During these times books were routinely removed from libraries and state agents posed as students in classes in order to spy on staff. **Raymond Basilio** (ACT Secretary General) described the problem in the following terms:

> *We have had members tagged online as terrorists because they have, as part of their teaching, discussed matters that some consider controversial. Social science materials have been labelled as subversive and if you discussed this material with your students you could be accused of trying to recruit students to the rebel group. Being painted as a part of the rebel movement put our members' lives at risk.*

Before this, profiling of union members was initiated by government, and exposed by leaked documents.

The situation is now much improved, but there continues to be risks and the union has to work constantly to protect the academic freedom of staff and union members. A key step forward was the establishment of the Committee on Promotion and Protection of Academic Freedom and Human Rights in the University of the Philippines which was led by the Office of the Faculty Regent with significant involvement from the union. The initiative represented a substantial success for the union, although it has not been adopted in all higher education institutions, and union work to extend its coverage remains on-going. Raymond Basilio argued that key to the union's campaign was its ability to construct an alliance of interests that extended beyond the union to include students, other academic groups as well as trade unions and human rights groups outside of education. One manifestation of this alliance was the broad-based '*Hands Off Our Teachers*' campaign that began as an umbrella group challenging the profiling of academic staff, and which

continues to make the case for academic freedom. The ACT also works internationally, through Education International and organisations such as Scholars at Risk.

CASE STUDY: Defending public research and academic freedom - the *Canadian Association of University Teachers* (CAUT, Canada).

The *Canadian Association of University Teachers* (CAUT) is a federation representing trade unions in the Canadian higher education sector. Unions generally bargain with individual institutions rather than with Federal or Provincial governments, but the sector has 90% union density and CAUT's Executive Director, **David Robinson**, is clear that this has enabled the union to negotiate many strong collective agreements, not only covering traditional terms and conditions (salaries and benefits), but also professional issues including academic freedom. Through negotiating strong agreements the union has been able to restrict the use of contingent contracts to levels that can still be improved, but which compare favourably to many higher education systems.

In recent years the union has fought a high profile public campaign to defend higher education research, both as an important investment conferring substantial social benefits, but also as an issue of academic freedom. Although Canadian higher education institutions fall primarily under provincial jurisdiction, funding for research is a federal matter and provided by the national government. According to David Robinson the Harper government (2006-2015) had consistently adopted an 'anti-science' perspective and 'essentially defunded basic research, making the case that only research that had immediate economic gains is what should be funded'.

The union faced the difficult challenge of transforming a largely obscure issue in terms of the public consciousness (higher education research) into one that had political traction in the public realm. The approach was to develop a very outward facing public campaign in which the union made the case for the value of higher education research, and the importance of scientists and scholars, not governments, to determine research priorities. The campaign involved public Town Hall meetings, in strategically important locations, where researchers talked about their work,

and its potential benefits. For Robinson, the campaign linked local impacts with wider societal benefits:

> *We were trying to make a real connection to the local community – but also to the national economy and society. We were removing the veil between 'town' [community] and 'gown' [university] – showing people how the work of researchers was relevant to them.*

Over time the campaign has been successful, with 60% of basic research income being federally funded, when previously this level had been reduced to 20%. The campaign represented an important victory, but Robinson highlights the need for on-going vigilance. For example, despite higher education research being a federal responsibility, the provincial government in Alberta had more recently sought to try to assert influence over research in universities in the province. The example illustrates the increasing risks of governments (national and regional) seeking to control research activity. The CAUT made the case for research to be determined by 'what is scientifically important – not what is politically important' (Robinson) and although the campaign was successful in Alberta, the issues continue to be of concern.

CASE STUDY: Protecting collegial governance - the *Irish Federation of University Teachers* (IFUT, Ireland)

In 2023 staff at Maynooth University in Ireland were informed that in future, staff representation on the university's governing authority would be based on selection, rather than election, thus removing any elected staff representatives from the university's principal governance body.

There had already been concerns as the university had been involved in making a significant number of new management appointments at a senior level that had the effect of inserting a new managerial tier between the President, and staff representative bodies such as Faculty and Academic Council. This had already given the impression that staff representation was being diminished, but the staff were given no notice of any changes to governance arrangements prior to the announcement of the removal of elected representatives, and their replacement by appointees.

Staff were initially surprised by the announcement, but this quickly turned to anger. On a point of principle, the removal of elected representatives was an attack on democracy in the university and the right of staff to elect their own representatives. At a practical level, the proposed changes undermined genuine transparency by ensuring that the key body responsible for ensuring the accountability of the university's senior management was appointed by the same senior management. This was viewed as poor governance with insufficient scrutiny of senior management.

Staff opposition to the changes quickly began to form, and this coalesced around the union branch. **Dr Sinéad Kennedy**, a member of the IFUT branch committee, explained that the union was the natural vehicle for staff to articulate their concerns.

The union branch has an effective structure – an organising structure. The branch has the ability to organise across faculties and also to make connections with other unions who are representing different types of staff. We could present a unified response from the staff – but it wasn't too difficult because there was strong unity from staff across the university.

As the obvious vehicle for articulating staff grievances, the union branch set about engaging with members and representing member views to the university's management. Despite coinciding with a holiday period the union organised a branch meeting that was extremely well attended. Union members' opposition to the changes was very clear. The branch sought meetings with the management, but was also able to increase pressure by organising a petition and gaining interest in the media (the issue coincided with events outside of education, but which had raised serious questions about governance in public institutions, increasing public interest). As awareness of the issues spread, the union branch received messages of support and solidarity from around the world.

As pressure grew the management's response was to offer a compromise involving a mix of elected and selected staff on the governing authority, but this was roundly rejected by staff. Staff maintained a united position, and the union was able to give expression to this unity. As a result, the university eventually announced that staff representatives would all be elected. This was a complete reversal of its original proposal.

The experience at Maynooth University provides an important example of how a union can act as a pole for staff grievances, that otherwise may struggle to be articulated with such clarity. Staff anger was undoubtedly already there – and would have found expression in some form. However, it is not clear whether this would have been able to achieve the same decisive outcome without union organisation.

As a result, the union attracted increased member involvement, and more effective inputs into a collective agreement being negotiated at the time. As Dr Kennedy stated '*the negotiations for the collective agreement were certainly helped by this struggle – because they [management] could see what we could do*'. It was also the case that involvement in the governing authority elections had much higher levels of participation and engagement (assisted by a union organised hustings of candidates). Candidates were clearly much more sensitised to the need to ensure institutional transparency and accountability, and are now well placed to defend collegial governance from future threats. Ironically, institutional democracy appears to have been revitalised as a direct consequence of managerial efforts to suppress it.

Nationally, the Maynooth experience raised the profile of HE governance issues among IFUT's members and more widely (with some evidence that other universities considering the same changes to governance structures decided not to proceed). As a national union IFUT has organised a series of member seminars on collegial governance and academic freedom and is exploring providing training to IFUT members who may be members of governing authorities. Awareness of the issues has been raised considerably, as has awareness of the value of collective union action.

CASE STUDY: Campaigning for academic freedom, institutional autonomy and collective bargaining - the *College Lecturers' Association of Zimbabwe* (COLAZ, Zimbabwe).

In the years following independence, the government in Zimbabwe intentionally divided further and higher education workers in the country by splitting tertiary sector workers in polytechnics and vocational colleges away from mainstream university workers, and according them civil service status, under the Public Service Act. Workers placed under this Act are denied several basic labour rights, including the right to strike and to negotiation (rather than only consultation) while access to arbitration can only take place with employer agreement (which is never provided). The intention of the move was to make collective action impossible, to then be able to drive down pay and working conditions.

COLAZ was formed in 2005 to tackle this threat to status and working conditions, and over time the size and influence of the union grew. The opportunity for growth emerged in a major strike in 2011, that the government and employers met with a vicious response. Large numbers of union activists, including its senior leadership, were suspended from their jobs and victimised. However, COLAZ refused to be intimidated and continued its campaign, albeit with different tactics as the union increasingly relied on advocacy and lobbying to make its case. In 2015, COLAZ joined Education International and important solidarity followed, all of which highlighted the unjust actions of the government and employers.

The union experienced victory in 2020 with the passing of the Manpower Planning and Development Act, which migrated TVET staff to a new employing authority called the Tertiary Education Services Council. Freed from the restrictions and bureaucracy of the Public Service Act, tertiary sector workers simultaneously enjoyed the benefits of greater academic freedom, enhanced institutional autonomy and strengthened collective bargaining – paving the way to restore the relative working conditions and rewards that past reforms had denied them.

The union's campaign highlighted the need for courageous leadership and determination alongside flexible tactics and international solidarity. As the union's President **David Dzatsunga** claimed, '*Against all odds, in one of the most difficult environments in which to organise, a small but patiently determined union managed to cause a change of legislation and provide its members their well-deserved status*'.

Conclusion: considering a revised instrument for higher education personnel

This summary report highlights the very difficult contexts within which higher education workers carry out their work. This inevitably looks different in different jurisdictions and the issues set out here are not experienced in a uniform and homogenous way. However, the global nature of the crises that currently beset many parts of the world do result in many shared experiences. A common phenomenon is that work in the higher education sector is becoming more complex, and more demanding with escalating external expectations placed on higher education systems being internalised at the institutional level, and then transmitted to employees in the form of increased pressures to perform (longer hours, higher 'output', diminishing task discretion and job control). At the same time, resources remain limited, often decreasing in real terms. Commonly, higher education workers experience declining living standards as the real value of salaries is eroded. For many there is also the continued, often increased, use of precarious contracts as employers transfer the risks associated with inadequate and uncertain funding to staff. Typically, those on such contracts are also those who experience wider labour market inequalities, often relating to gender, race/ethnicity and (dis)ability, most acutely.

Inevitably these working conditions generate considerable pressures, and there is evidence that the working conditions set out above are contributing to increased mental health and wellbeing problems experienced by higher education workers. These issues were recognised by the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* when it argued that wellbeing in an education context is '*a wide-ranging concept that encompasses several general principles: respect and social status; remuneration and conditions of work; employment status; professional autonomy and agency; and healthy and safe working environments*' (ILO, 2024, p 13). Focusing specifically on wellbeing in the higher education sector (Wray & Kinman, 2021), one national study revealed that staff perceptions of the psychosocial safety climate in HEIs are 'typically poor – more so than studies of other organisations' (p. 3), and that higher education employees reported lower than average wellbeing

in relation to all work hazard categories. The report also asserted that '*the level of mental wellbeing among HE employees was considerably lower than population norms*' (ibid.). Wray and Kinman conclude that steps taken to address these issues need to be real and meaningful. The authors highlight the importance at the organisational level of responsive management (willing, for example, to properly tackle workload problems), effective policies and meaningful professional autonomy and job control. In this report, we would emphasise the importance of robust social dialogue and collective bargaining as an essential factor in ensuring that organisational measures are appropriate, sufficient and applied in practice.

In an age of multiple crises there is a real danger of a serious mental health crisis among the higher education workforce in many contexts. This can only be addressed by taking bold and meaningful steps to tackle the issues at source. The *1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* provides an important framework for addressing this work, with national and institution level implementation requiring effective social dialogue to ensure full compliance. In many instances the issues raised in the *1997 Recommendation* remain tremendously valuable and they retain their relevance and utility despite greatly transformed environments. However, it is also important to ensure the Recommendation is fit for purpose in much changed, and rapidly changing, circumstances and in some cases new issues have emerged that were barely visible when the *1997 Recommendation* was being prepared. In other instances, established issues have assumed new forms.

It is timely and welcome therefore that the recommendations of the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* (ILO, 2024) called for the United Nations to '*adopt an up-to-date international instrument, including a convention or a revision of existing instruments*' (ibid, p. 12).

Drawing on evidence and issues presented in this report, here we identify four areas where a revised instrument must better reflect contemporary conditions.

Collegial governance and the erosion of academic freedom

In recent years, higher education governance arrangements have become even more complex with a clear trend towards more managerial approaches and a corresponding decline in the influence of democratically elected bodies of scholars. The *1997 Recommendation* legitimately highlights the need to balance institutional autonomy with public accountability, but it is clear that issues relating to collegial governance and academic freedom are becoming more complex as new management models, new technologies and new media are all capable of seriously undermining established democratic governance structures and academic freedom. Evidence presented from the case studies in the second section of this report suggests that existing mechanisms relating to the application of the Recommendation have failed to fully grasp the implications of a higher education system in which the complexity (and opacity) of new management arrangements has an impact not only on working conditions, but also on academic freedom. A revised instrument should address this limitation.

The changing impact of technology in education

It is a sign of the pace of change in the area of technology's role in education that, as the ILO's 2016 reissue of the *1966* and *1997 Recommendations* notes, there is no reference in the original reports to information and communications technology or to open and distance learning (ILO, 2016). This point was also made by Stromquist (2017) in her assessment of the *1997 Recommendation* on its 20 year anniversary. Moreover, in the period since the ILO made this observation in 2016, the volume of technological change has probably exceeded that which had occurred between the original report and the reissued document 50 years later. Artificial Intelligence is already beginning to have a transformatory impact on the higher education sector with its future impact likely to be profound.

There is no doubt that any revised instrument, and the future work of those seeking to ensure compliance, must pay much closer attention to the full range of developments in technology. Clearly there is the potential for considerable benefits in all areas of higher education, both teaching and research.

However, it is also important to recognise the threats these developments pose to working conditions, academic freedom and the values and independence of public higher education. Furthermore, it is impossible to envisage these issues being addressed in a remotely adequate way without recognising the need for much more robust social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Challenging workforce inequalities

In the *1997 Recommendation* there are a limited number of references to the need for equal treatment of all workers, including 'women and members of minorities' (paragraph 39). Paragraph 70 specifically addresses the issues of women working in higher education, but it is short and limited to a generic call for 'equality of treatment and opportunity', while the following paragraph (71) that refers to the rights of disabled workers is equally brief. By any contemporary standards, these statements must be considered inadequate. Not only do they fail to take account of the multiple sources of oppression that range far beyond gender and disability, but they also fail to take into account how oppression intersects with, and amplifies, the discrimination and prejudice that those from oppressed groups face.

Any revision of the 1997 instrument must involve a much more sophisticated analysis of how structural inequalities are embedded within society, how different oppressions inter-relate and generate more complex oppressions, and how all of these developments are experienced in higher education contexts that often reproduce and amplify, rather than diminish, inequalities. Such a revision to the instrument feels particularly prescient given the extent to which progress on these issues has recently been exposed as vulnerable. It is now abundantly clear that there is no irreversible path towards greater equality and social justice, but that the goal of a sector free from discrimination must be protected, and advances defended. A revised instrument can make a significant contribution to this objective.

A focus on wellbeing

Contemporary thinking increasingly recognises the inter-related, and interdependent relationship between many of the factors

identified in this report, and the concomitant need to tackle problems in a holistic and integrated way. There is also a recognition that a failure to take the wellbeing of higher education workers seriously contributes directly to the stress and burnout that impose tremendous personal and institutional costs across many higher education systems. This more holistic approach was reflected in much of the work of the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* with its focus on wellbeing, and its exhortation to develop 'systemic teacher well-being policies that are reflected in teachers' conditions of service' (ILO, 2024, p. 9). Within the work of the High Level Panel it was acknowledged that many of the factors that impact wellbeing are experienced differently by different sections of the workforce, including for example, the experience of those who have to combine paid employment and caring roles (predominantly women). Hence the need to adopt a wellbeing focus to ensure an integrated and holistic approach to improving working conditions.

The UNESCO 1997 Recommendation and its application through the work of CEART: Ensuring fitness for purpose in changing times

Both the *1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers*, and the *1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* are promoted, and monitored, by a body established jointly by ILO and UNESCO, referred to as the *Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel* (hereafter, CEART).

CEART is made up of a panel of experts drawn from around the world, and with specialisms in education, teaching and labour issues. The role of CEART is to examine 'trends in teaching and how countries are applying the Recommendations' (ILO, online). Crucially CEART also has a role in examining allegations made by teacher organisations relating to Member States' non-compliance with elements of the Recommendations. In these cases CEART takes evidence from the teacher organisation and the relevant government, and 'issues findings and makes recommendations for the resolution of such cases' (ibid.).

In the recommendations of the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* (ILO, 2024) it was proposed that the United Nations should seek to update existing instruments to take account of changed, and changing circumstances, (ibid, p. 12) and that:

> *The application of such an instrument should be monitored through a strengthened mandate for the joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel or a similar body (ILO, 2024, p. 12)*

The call for a strengthened mandate is important and timely, and a review of CEART's work is to be welcomed in order for the Committee to continue to provide a key role in ensuring the Recommendations both retain and extend their relevance and credibility. This report seeks to contribute to this review by exploring in some detail those instances where trade unions representing higher education workers have raised allegations with CEART in relation to claimed non-compliance with the *1997 Recommendation*. We present this evidence as three case-studies that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the application of the *1997 Recommendation*, and how it might benefit from revision, but also how the CEART process itself might be made more effective. In presenting these cases we also hope to raise awareness among sector trade unions about the CEART process and how they may be able to engage with it (both by drawing on the *1997 Recommendation* in negotiations, and by lodging allegations with CEART where appropriate).

As indicated, this summary of education trade union engagement with the CEART process focuses on higher education sector trade unions that have lodged formal allegations. This is clearly a particular form of engagement in contexts where transgressions in relation to the *1997 Recommendation* are considered very serious. By their nature, such processes are not used frequently, as the aim is to resolve issues before they escalate. However, there may still be a case for arguing they could be used more often than they are. That said, it is important to recognise that a more common use of the *1997 Recommendation* is when education trade unions invoke them as part of their more regular negotiating and advocacy (although the precise extent of this type of usage is difficult to quantify). In this study several instances emerged that illustrate this type of use.

For example, members of the **Association of Concerned Teachers** (Philippines) reported how a visit to the country by UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Ms Irene Khan, was an opportunity

for the union to present their particular concerns about the threats to academic freedom in universities. In presenting evidence to Ms Khan the ACT made extensive use of the *1997 Recommendation*, and was pleased when the Rapporteur made reference to academic freedom as 'a fundamental right of our professors in universities' (Raymond Basilio, ACT Secretary General). The Rapporteur will present her report in June 2025.

In Canada the **Canadian Association of University Teachers** (CAUT) highlighted the value of the *1997 Recommendation* in their specific context where there is no national legislation or formal constitutional protection of academic freedom, and law based on past cases offers only limited guidance. CAUT Executive Director **David Robinson** argued that R97 offers a 'very robust definition of academic freedom' which is important in a context where there is no equivalent statement at the national level. He asserted:

> *It is the only international instrument that codifies academic freedom – and that is really important. It could be improved further – but it is still important.*

CAUT has used the *1997 Recommendation* in various proceedings in Canada's labour arbitration system, particularly in relation to interpretations of academic freedom. Despite R97 having no formal legal recognition David Robinson stated '*it often guides arbitrators and judges in terms of their interpretations of academic freedom*' and the union can cite several specific cases where use of the *1997 Recommendation* has contributed to a successful outcome.

The examples above highlight the importance of the *1997 Recommendation* in relation to academic freedom, and in the specific context of higher education, it is perhaps unsurprising that this is where HE unions use them most frequently. Moreover, this is a use that may increase as the threats to academic freedom that have been highlighted in this report continue to grow. However, the *1997 Recommendation* covers a wide range of issues and it is important to recognise how higher education sector trade unions draw on R97 in relation to other issues. For example, in this study the University Academic Staff Association in Kenya made use of the *Recommendation* to support its case for full public funding of higher education, and its opposition to privatisation.

Reviewing the CEART process: three case studies

In this section we provide three detailed case studies of education trade unions that have raised allegations through CEART. The case studies highlight challenges, but also demonstrate how raising an allegation with CEART can be an important element of a strategy intended to tackle key issues confronting higher education workers.

CEART allegation raised by DM (Denmark)

Timeline

On 22 May 2008, the union formerly known as *Dansk Magisterforening* (now *DM*) – an organisation of, at the time, 36,000 members representing academics and researchers in the Danish higher education system - submitted an allegation to the Director-General of UNESCO, claiming non-observance of key elements of the *1997 Recommendation* (UNESCO, 1997). On 6 August 2009, Educational International submitted further evidence to support the allegation. Following this, the Danish Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation responded to the allegations. The Joint Committee's findings and recommendations were published in November 2009.

Background to the submission

The context for DM's allegation to the Joint Committee was the passing of the University Act 2003 and the fundamental changes that this introduced to collegial governance in Danish higher education. The Minister at the time had previously published a document entitled '*New Paths between Research and Business: From Thought to Invoice*' (Regeringen, 2003) in which he argued that HEIs were not sufficiently flexible for the new competitive environment and much more emphasis should be placed on the commercial exploitation of knowledge production. The legislation was passed with bi-partisan support including from the Social Democratic Party, who were strongly influenced by human capital theory thinking at the time. Higher education institutions were seen as primarily being concerned with supporting economic growth.

The legislation seriously disrupted existing governance arrangements and introduced a classically managerial model, in which more traditional forms of collegial governance were sidelined, or '*de facto* abolished' in the words of a DM official. This attracted opposition from many academics, but it was the assessment of the DM official we interviewed that many scholars in higher education institutions were sceptical that the reforms would actually lead to real change. The argument was offered that colleagues had seen reforms previously, but which amounted to limited change in reality, and that they perhaps expected this experience to be repeated. That is, nothing much would really change. Hence general opposition did not translate to tangible anger, and this limited the possibility of a significant mobilisation of members to challenge the attacks on academic freedom. The union was faced with a challenge, therefore, as to how to prosecute a campaign that was seen as strategically very important, but around which it was proving difficult to organise its members.

The union had taken advantage of consultations within the legislative process, but, given the bi-partisan support for the proposed legislation across political parties, '*no one took any notice of us highlighting these risks*' and so other options needed to be explored.

The 'inspiration' to pursue the CEART route was in part based on the involvement of DM officials in ETUCE and EI bodies, and so there was an awareness, for example, of the action of an Australian higher education sector union which had already raised an allegation with CEART. When this was proposed to DM's leadership the Executive Board provided unanimous support. The submission was drafted internally by a small number of union officials, with some involvement from the union's legal department.

The basis of the allegation, the government response and Joint Committee conclusions

The union's allegation focused on the implications of the University Act 2003 for higher education workers in three specific areas, asserting that the new legislation violated sections 26-30 of the *1997 Recommendation* in relation to:

- Freedom of research
- Institutional autonomy
- Collegial governance

Additionally, DM alleged that the working conditions of higher academic staff did not reflect their status, lagged behind that of equivalents in comparable countries and prevented academics and researchers from carrying out their work effectively (DM, 2008).

Central to the union's allegation was a new relationship between the government and HEIs that was established through a series of 'performance contracts'. The union argued that the new performance contracts represented new controls by the government in relation to the work of individual higher education institutions, with further concerns that performance contracts would be translated into institutional strategic frameworks (see S. 17.2 of the Act) that would, in turn, be imposed on academic staff through a more direct and managerialist 'line management' model of governance.

DM argued that the introduction of performance contracts on higher education institutions represented a material diminution in institutional autonomy as individual HEIs would be required to meet external targets relating to educational programmes, graduations, research activity etc. The union was further concerned that these pressures were exacerbated by a series of institution mergers in 2007 that were imposed across the Danish higher education system, and which gave individual establishments no meaningful influence over the process (thereby violating section 22 of the *1997 Recommendation*).

The experience of the mergers highlighted wider questions of institutional governance as the new legislation stipulated that University Academic Boards (the most senior body in the institution) must comprise a majority of externally appointed members, with the Chair also being an external appointment. Academic Councils could have a majority of staff members but such bodies had limited powers, and were often seen as fulfilling a purely advisory role. In the union's view, the impact of the legislative changes was to diminish the role of academic staff in meaningful institutional decision-making, while simultaneously reducing accountability by shifting away from elected roles in favour of direct appointments. The union's concern was that the imposition of performance contracts, to be implemented at the institutional level by a hierarchy of line managers, would lead to individual researchers being required to complete work to meet institutional objectives, while

correspondingly not being able to undertake work that was deemed to be outside of the strategic objectives (other than in researchers' own time and therefore outside of formal work hours).

Education International's additional submission reinforced concerns that collegial governance was being eroded and that competitive funding models were diminishing academic freedom as career progression and job security were increasingly being tied to meeting externally imposed performance targets, thereby pressurising academic staff to pursue particular research agendas, possibly at the expense of what their own expertise deemed as more useful and innovative research. EI also highlighted concerns about the prevalence of temporary contracts and the poor conditions, and lack of collective bargaining rights, experienced by part-time workers (disproportionately women). EI's submission further made explicit the often opaque connection between job insecurity and the negative impact on academic freedom.

The response of the Danish Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation was in part to seek to diminish the union's case based on the argument that the union simply did not like, or agree with, the reforms in the Act. The union also asserted that the government had traditionally dismissed the relevance of UNESCO in the Danish context (despite being a signatory to the *1997 Recommendation*) arguing that OECD standards offered a more appropriate reference point. Indeed, it was indicated that OECD reports had praised the new law in Denmark suggesting this provided a governance model for modern HEIs (although a subsequent OECD report (UFM, 2009) adopted a more critical stance, reflecting, at least in part, some of the concerns raised by the union).

The government's evidence asserted its right to set parameters for the use of public funds, as long as these were consistent with the rights to free speech and academic freedom. The government pointed out that free speech was protected by the Constitution. It further argued that performance contracts with individual HEIs introduced by the legislation were not intended to be prescriptive, but were intended to provide a framework within which research would take place. It was the government's view that the legislation provided explicit safeguards to protect academic

freedom. It also pointed out that performance contracts were not legally binding, offering additional safeguards.

The Joint Committee's conclusions and recommendations sought to navigate a path between the competing arguments of the union and the Ministry about the impact of the legislation on academic freedom. The Committee noted the need for '*a proper balance between the level of autonomy enjoyed by higher education institutions and their systems of accountability without harming academic freedom*' (ILO, 2009, p. 8), and in so doing it signalled its reluctance to recognise the threats to academic freedom that were emerging from new and still developing forms of governance that relied heavily on redirecting institutions towards externally derived targets and metrics, often implemented through increasingly performative management systems. Indeed, the Joint Committee suggested that the DM case was based on general union '*dissatisfaction*' (ibid) rather than the tangible acts of an HEI or government that had manifestly curtailed the academic freedom of an individual scholar or group of scholars.

The Joint Committee goes on to assert:

> *It is possible that a strategic framework could restrict the provisions of section 29 of the 1997 Recommendations, but the Joint Committee has no evidence that the legislation has in fact limited the freedom of academic staff to carry out their research. (ibid, p.9)*

This statement further illustrated the Committee's apparent unwillingness to act on the basis of an intellectual argument without supporting and tangible evidence of violations, however compelling the intellectual argument might be.

The Joint Committee rejected the union's case that legislation violated the *1997 Recommendation* in relation to collegial governance claiming that Academic Boards (that now included a majority of external appointments and an external Chair) were not 'academic bodies' as defined by the *1997 Recommendation*. The Committee was therefore unambiguous in its assertion that such bodies were 'not uncommon' and not in contravention of the *1997 Recommendation*.

The Joint Committee's own recommendations, consistent with its own general conclusions,

were correspondingly modest. The report called for ongoing discussion and monitoring between social partners, and specifically social dialogue between the union and the Ministry in relation to the performance contracts between the Government and individual HEIs.

Reflections on the outcomes and lessons to be learned

In some senses, the Joint Committee's own conclusions can be considered as only a limited success for the union. For example, as indicated, the Joint Committee did not dispute the government's right to establish new governance arrangements that gave a much more prominent role to external and appointed positions, at the expense of positions taken up by democratically elected academics. However, and perhaps most significantly, the Committee did conclude that the changes introduced through the legislation had the potential to limit academic freedom in ways that were inconsistent with the *Recommendation*. As the DM official asserted:

> *. . . they agreed that there was too weak protection and that what was written in the law did not provide sufficient protection, and was not living up to the standards, that were set in the [1997] Recommendation. I think the Recommendation as an international standards-setting tool were not met by the law. It [the Act] did not live up to the standards set in the Recommendation – and CEART agreed to that.*

DM's concerns were vindicated a short time later when it was revealed that researchers in a government-sponsored research institute that had become part of the university system through the 2007 mergers and amalgamations had been subjected to a 'double confidentiality' clause that not only prevented institute members intervening in public policy debates but also forbade them from discussing this constraint on their academic freedom (see Andersen, 2017). For the union, there was some frustration at the Joint Committee's demand for tangible evidence of a violation, when the union's prediction of problems based on an intellectual argument was subsequently borne out but had not been at the time when the allegation was submitted. The DM official further pointed out that securing 'evidence' can be difficult if such evidence requires individual academics

to present themselves as cases. In many ways, the lack of academic freedom that academics seek to challenge also discourages academics from being willing to act as exemplar cases (through fear of negative consequences for future career development).

Despite the limited nature of the Joint Committee's recommendations (which the union had always been realistic about), the DM official was in no doubt that raising the allegation through the CEART process was the right thing to do. The union had experienced some difficulty mobilising members around the topic as the issues were complex and most members appeared sceptical that the reforms would make any real difference. In many ways, this highlights the problems of raising member awareness around issues that tend to slowly erode, rather than dramatically diminish, existing working standards. However, the ability to take the case to CEART gave the union a focus for its concerns, and high-level support from the union (in the form of communications to members, some from the President) raised the issues in members' consciousness. Certainly, it was reported that members were hugely appreciative of the action being taken, and many wrote to the union to support the union's initiative.

More widely the Danish government was compelled to defend itself in a public, and international, forum and it became no longer tenable for the government to defer to bodies such as OECD, while apparently having little regard for bodies such as UNESCO. For a country conscious of its international reputation, and typically claiming to be well-regarded in terms of international standards, there was a sense that DM's case had been a public embarrassment for the government, and there was some subsequent shift in the public discourse. It is significant that some years later the Danish government unilaterally approached CEART to inform them of how more recent reforms had addressed some earlier concerns. The union was sceptical that the reforms were as bold as they needed to be, but these post-hearing developments attest to some longer-term influence that may be more indirect than direct but must be considered significant nevertheless. These developments demonstrate that some of the benefits that emerge from raising a CEART allegation are not always immediately apparent, but rather emerge over time.

CEART allegation raised by the Federación Nacional de Docentes Universitarios (CONADU, Argentina).

Timeline

The Secretariat of the Joint Committee received an allegation from CONADU through Education International on 20 April 2018. The allegation was deemed eligible according to the *Recommendation* and the government of Argentina was invited to respond, which it did on 6 March 2019. CONADU provided a response to the government's submission on 30 September 2019 and on 2 April 2020, the Argentine government indicated its counter-response was delayed by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Joint Committee report notes that '*Despite further reminders, no further communication by the government has been received*' (ILO/UNESCO, 2021, p. 17). On 24 September 2021, CONADU provided the Joint Committee with an update on the situation in 2021, shortly before the Joint Committee published its recommendations (ILO/UNESCO, 2021).

Background to the submission

The decision to file an allegation with the Joint Committee emerged from the involvement of CONADU's Secretary of International Affairs in Education International. This raised awareness of CEART and its possibilities. The decision to lodge an allegation was made at the national level following consultation with grassroots unions of all public universities (that act as autonomous individual branches) and after their agreement to proceed.

The focus of the submission was not a specific policy or law but based on a range of issues that, when taken together, were presented as an attack on public universities as institutions. They were all underpinned by the de-funding of higher education at a time of chronic inflation, and the government's approach was encouraged by sympathetic media that intentionally provoked hostility to the university sector based on inaccurate reports (described as 'fake news' by one CONADU official).

The real-terms budget cuts imposed by the government at the time had an obvious and direct impact on salaries in higher education as salaries are determined at the national level. Broader working conditions are governed by a general framework collective agreement that applies to all HEIs and which is implemented at the level of the individual institution. As part of the attacks on the sector, the government refused to engage with unions in the tri-partite mechanism for negotiating collective agreements.

The above was the basis of the union's allegation, with the submission itself supported by involving local unions in the collection of evidence from individual universities. One CONADU official described the submission as an act of 'collective construction' involving the national union and local branches working together. This approach allowed the union to highlight many local issues including union non-recognition, precarious hiring outside the framework of the national agreement, and the intimidation and victimisation of local union activists.

The basis of the allegation, the government response and Joint Committee conclusions

The allegation from CONADU embraced a number of linked issues. Central to the union's concerns was the allegation that from 2016 the government in Argentina had set about systematically under-funding the higher education sector. Nominal increases in funding were substantially below Argentina's high rate of inflation and amounted to significant real terms cuts. This breached the *1997 Recommendation* (paragraph 10 in relation to investment).

Several aspects of CONADU's allegations related to instances at specific universities where there was experience of intimidation and persecution of trade union members (violating paragraph 48 of the *1997 Recommendation*). In one instance an individual institution (invoking its own institutional autonomy as a justification) had refused to apply a collective agreement (agreement 1264/2015), which was a denial

of the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

More generally, the union reported a raft of bad practices in relation to working conditions including the abuse of temporary employment contracts, the irregular use of evaluation procedures (resulting in dismissals), the arbitrary extension of probation periods and the failure to pay agreed salary increases.

Taken together, the levels of intimidation, the lack of job security and the willingness of employers to resort to dismissal, CONADU alleged that staff were not able to participate fully in institutional decision-making and hence individual autonomy and collegiality of governance were compromised.

The government's response to CONADU's allegation (submitted to the Joint Committee 11 months after the initial submission, and unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic) is conspicuous for its brevity (it occupies six lines of the CEART report, and may be considered contemptuous as a serious response). The government cited increases in nominal spending as increases in investment and cynically asserted, as per the Joint Committee's report:

> *The Government argues that all matters related to working conditions and collegial governance are governed by the universities and that it would be a violation of university autonomy to interfere in matters raised by the unions. (ILO/UNESCO, 2021, p. 18).*

In its response to the government, the union rejected the government's denial of responsibility and reiterated its concerns across a wide range of issues. These focused again on funding (diminished in real terms given inflation at 50%+), the experience of intimidation and persecution, and the widespread levels of job insecurity. These latter factors had a negative impact on individual autonomy and collegial governance.

However, the union was able to report a change of government had presaged some progress on issues that had been a matter of concern. There was clear evidence of improvements in the funding situation, and there were also several examples of enhanced social dialogue ranging over several issues (ibid. p. 19). For example, there were new collective agreements signed in October

2020 and March and May 2021 and a social commission was established to review the regularisation of teaching personnel.

Intimidation of trade union activists had eased substantially ('ceased' in many universities, according to the CEART report, p. 19), but it had not been eliminated completely.

The Joint Committee noted the impact of the change of government, and also the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the process, although it appeared sceptical that the COVID-19 pandemic justified the government's lack of co-operation. The Joint Committee's report also noted that subsequent improvements had followed renewed efforts by the new government to engage with the union:

> *Moreover, much of this progress, including negotiation on conditions of work in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, was set out with teacher unions through social dialogue. This is proof positive that constructive dialogue can lead to progress on many issues, and the Joint Committee commends the efforts by both parties to find agreement in these areas. (ibid.)*

In relation to specific issues, the Joint Committee noted concerns about funding and reiterated the position set out in the Recommendation that public spending on higher education needs to be viewed as an essential investment for economic and social reasons and prioritised accordingly.

The Joint Committee highlighted significant concerns about persecution and intimidation of staff (in particular, union activists) and reiterated the incompatibility of such practices with the *1997 Recommendation*. The Joint Committee further noted that poor employment practices, such as the abuse of fixed-term contracts, are not only a problem to be tackled in their own right, but such precarious employment further contributes to undermining academic freedom.

The Joint Committee rejected the view of the government, and of some universities, that 'institutional autonomy' provided a justification for failing to enforce collective agreements. The Joint Committee report quoted directly the *1997 Recommendation* that assert:

> *Autonomy should not be used by higher education institutions as a pre-test*

to limit the rights of higher education teaching personnel provided for in this Recommendation or in other international standards set out in the appendix (ibid. p. 20)

The report goes on to assert that '*protection of institutional autonomy should in no way shield governments and universities from the responsibility to respect collective agreements or other rights of higher-education teaching personnel*' (ibid. pp. 20-21).

The Joint Committee's first recommendation was to encourage the government of Argentina to '*urgently ensure that acts of trade union restriction and intimidation cease at all higher-education institutions*' (ibid. p. 21). Other recommendations focused on the need to apply all policies, laws and collective agreements relating to higher education personnel and to engage in further social dialogue and collective bargaining on issues relating to secure work, the use of technology and the financing of higher education.

Reflections on the outcomes and lessons to be learned

The outcome of the CEART report was in part frustrated by the government's lack of engagement with the process. It was reluctant to respond to issues raised by the union through CEART, and the issues only began to be resolved by a change of government.

Central to the government's initial response was that universities are autonomous institutions and so it refused to recognise the identified issues, and it sought to distance itself from local situations arguing they were handled by local institutional authorities. The union noted that CEART only engages with the national government and there is no mechanism to engage with individual institutions, where many problems were being experienced (including union victimisation). As a result, the union was frustrated that many of the issues it raised were not addressed because CEART was not able to address issues at an institutional level. This experience highlights a tension in the CEART process (that is reflected in other case studies) that the responsibilities, roles and accountabilities within the system are not clear and this allows governments to invoke 'institutional autonomy' as its justification for refusing to take remedial action.

The CONADU case also highlights the problems that arise when governments act in an intransigent manner, and when their refusal to engage with the unions translates into a reluctance to engage with the Joint Committee. CONADU officials pointed out that the non-binding nature of the Joint Committee's recommendations in its final report make it possible for governments to try to ignore outcomes they disagree with.

CONADU officials argued that governments need to be held more accountable for violations of the *1997 Recommendation*, perhaps by making Joint Committee report recommendations binding in the form of a Convention. They also argued that the process could be enhanced by encouraging direct representations (that is, in person) to the Joint Committee, and allowing opportunities to collate more evidence, while from a union perspective, it is necessary to share experiences across unions so that individual unions can develop submissions that maximise the chances of a successful outcome.

Argentina: A Postscript

In December 2023 Javier Milei, of '*La Libertad Avanza*', a libertarian political party, was elected as National President. Milei has consistently advocated for radical neoliberal reforms across the public sector and has promoted an extreme right-wing politics in Argentina.

The impact of the Milei administration on the higher education sector has been immediate and devastating. Economic reforms, including large budget cuts, have had an instant impact on salaries, and are as serious as anything experienced during the period of the initial CEART allegation. Sector funding has been maintained at 2023 levels, despite inflation eroding the real value of spending by 80%, thereby threatening the continued operation of many individual institutions (BBC, 2024). These cuts in funding were openly justified as trying to undermine work in universities that the government considered contrary to its own ideological position (ibid) – anticipating later action by the Trump Presidency in relation to institutions such as Columbia and Harvard Universities. CONADU has understandable concerns about the clear and obvious threat to academic freedom, as well as the existential threats posed to some institutions by budget cuts.

CONADU immediately sought to mobilise the union's members as part of a broad-based campaign in defence of public higher education. In April 2024, the union estimated 1.5 million people were involved in a demonstration to protest against the government's cuts to sector budgets (Fassina, 2024; Misculin, 2024). Since that time the government has tried to argue that it is addressing concerns in the higher education sector (infobae, 2024), but the response remains completely inadequate. There has been no attempt to address the fundamental issue – most notably that salaries (90% of the higher education budget) had already been eroded by 60% in nominal terms, and 30% in real terms, in the six months after Milei was elected. Instead, the Milei government remains intent on pressing forward with its 'regressive and mercantile reform of public universities' (CONADU, 2024).

CONADU played a key role in building the 23 April demonstration in Buenos Aires and other mobilisations, but it recognises that challenging the Milei government needs a sophisticated strategy that works on several fronts. This is why the union is currently considering a renewed submission to CEART that confronts the issues raised by the new political landscape. Union officials are clear that the intention to develop a new submission is not based on an unrealistic assumption of the likelihood that the Milei government will respond willingly to the recommendations of an international body (Milei is on record as being highly critical of such international bodies). Rather, the approach is based on a commitment to connect member mobilisations with international processes which, when combined together, may shift the political dial. The two approaches are not being treated as 'either/or', but as dual elements of a single strategy. At the present time, the union is considering its submission, and planning to use the process of construction to engage with the grassroots and to involve them in the campaign. As one CONADU official commented, the process of generating a submission should not be just a bureaucratic process but should be an opportunity '*to raise awareness of the issues and to generate political support*'.

The union seeks to maximise its leverage against an authoritarian government by mobilising support across a range of sites – in individual universities, at the national level, and potentially internationally through CEART. It is unlikely that any single approach will be successful on its own, but when pressure is built across all these fronts then the possibilities of progress are enhanced.

CEART allegation raised by the University and College Union (UCU, United Kingdom)

Timeline

The *University and College Union* (UCU) lodged its allegation with the Joint Committee on 28 January 2019. The allegation was lodged jointly, working with Education International. The United Kingdom (UK) government provided its response to the allegation on 23 May 2019, and UCU subsequently provided its response to the government's contribution in September of the same year. The UK government made a final response to UCU, but this contribution is not dated in the CEART report on the allegation, and UCU reported that it never saw a copy of the UK government's final contribution to the process. CEART's final recommendations were published in September 2021 (ILO/UNESCO, 2021).

Background to the submission

The context for the submission was a research report that was commissioned by UCU into academic freedom in UK universities. The research was undertaken by Professor Terence Karran and Lucy Mallinson at the University of Lincoln and involved a survey of UCU members (securing over 2000 responses) (Karran & Mallinson, 2017). Professor Karran had previously had contacts with DM (whose case was described previously in this report) and was fully aware of DM's submission of an allegation to CEART in 2008 (DM, 2008). Hence his report for UCU recommended making use of the same system as a mechanism to raise UCU's concerns. Professor Karran's report was received by UCU's Education Committee (a sub-committee of the national executive) and the recommendation to submit an allegation to CEART was agreed upon and adopted.

The allegation itself was drafted in part by Professor Karran, and in part by the UCU official with responsibility for issues such as institutional governance and academic freedom. There was considerable contact with DM in order to learn lessons from DM's experience and UCU took seriously DM's advice to be able to demonstrate tangible evidence of real harm being experienced (as opposed to a largely intellectual argument about the potential of policies to cause harm). Hence UCU's case was based on the survey undertaken for the UCU research report, and then comparisons were made with academics across the European Union based on an equivalent survey undertaken by Karran and colleagues (Karran et al., 2017).

As it transpired, the UK government's response elected to challenge the evidence base presented by UCU. The government sought to claim the survey was small-scale (even though the survey was sufficiently large to be able to present generalisable findings) and the government also chose to reject the comparison with other European nations, arguing that this failed to take into account the broader international picture. In many ways, this response highlights problems that can be experienced when governments refuse to engage constructively with the CEART process but rather adopt a position of unambiguous denial of the problem.

The basis of the allegation, the government response and Joint Committee conclusions

UCU's allegation was based on the argument that teachers and researchers in the UK enjoy restricted academic freedom because de jure protections (for example, constitutional and legislative protections) are limited, and these weak protections contribute to low levels of de facto academic freedom (that is, their experiences in practice) (UCU, 2019). Central to UCU's argument was that this relatively poor position (based on a comparison with academics across the European Union) was deteriorating further as a raft of policy developments served to further constrain the activities of UK academics. At this point, it is important to note, as UCU did, that education policy in the UK is a devolved responsibility and there are significant differences in experiences across the different nations of the UK.

UCU's allegation focused on threats to academic freedom in the two core areas of teaching and research (described as substantive elements) but also argued that constrained collegial governance and weak job

security (described as supportive elements) further undermined academic freedom in the core areas of teaching and research. In relation to teaching and research, UCU's submission argued that UK academics had no constitutional protection of their academic freedom because the UK does not have a written constitution. This situation contrasted sharply with the vast majority of EU countries (UCU, 2019). There was evidence of some legislative protections, but these were ambiguous and some elements of recent legislation threatened to undermine academic freedom. Of particular concern to the union was that a raft of initiatives relating to system accountability, but also claimed anti-terrorism measures (the so-called 'Prevent' duties – see UCU, 2021 for union concerns), were working in complex ways to curtail the ability of academic colleagues to determine for themselves what they might teach and research. Although not explicitly linked to academic freedom, measures such as the Research Excellence Framework and the Teaching Excellence Framework, buttressed by national student satisfaction surveys and institutions such as the Office for Students, served to direct research and teaching activities in particular ways, with managerial consequences if performative targets were not met. Many of these elements of UK higher education governance were long established, but they were reinforced and deepened by the introduction of the Higher Education and Research Act, of 2017.

In UCU's submission (UCU, 2019), the union argued that governance arrangements in many UK universities failed to meet the expectation for staff participation set out in the *1997 Recommendation* (a situation somewhat better in Scotland where legislation passed by the Scottish government had resulted in some improvements), and that these problems were compounded by very high levels of precarious contracts in the sector (see UCU, 2023 for updated data), that made many staff feel exposed and vulnerable. Job security was typically achieved by demonstrating an ability to achieve performance metrics, many of which were rooted in marketised measures of success and efficiency.

UCU's report then used Karran and Mallinson's survey evidence to demonstrate that the union membership's assessment of their academic freedom suggested it was being diminished, and that when compared to a similar survey of academics in the EU, it compared unfavourably to experiences elsewhere.

The response of the UK government was not at all constructive. The absence of any constitutional protections was presented as consonant with the UK's tradition of maintaining an unwritten constitution and it was argued that this was not incompatible with providing de jure protections for academic freedom. There was a robust rejection of the argument that any of the accountability mechanisms introduced into the UK higher education system were having a detrimental impact on academic freedom. The union's evidence base was dismissed as a small-scale survey based on the self-reporting of academics. Arguably the issue at the heart of the government's rebuttal was that the issues raised by UCU were for individual institutions to address, and not the responsibility of the government. The issue was highlighted in the CEART report that stated:

> *Noting the statistics provided by the UCU on the number of academic staff employed on fixed-term and hourly paid contracts, the Government explains that in England, higher education providers are autonomous institutions. As autonomous institutions, higher education providers were responsible for ensuring their own financial sustainability. It was appropriate that they retain the ability to manage their own workforce and planning. (ILO/ UNESCO, 2021, p. 29).*

What is significant to note at this point is that for many years the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA) has also maintained that it has no responsibility for determining individual universities' use of fixed-term contracts and so responsibility for these issues on behalf of both government and employers is placed squarely on the 150+ individual higher education institutions in the UK.

The findings of the Joint Committee sought to steer a careful path between the issues raised by the union, and the defence provided by the UK government. The Committee noted that there is no one way to ensure academic freedom and institutional autonomy (such as the need for written constitutional protections), and it was also sympathetic to the need for governments to balance institutional autonomy with demands for system accountability. The Joint Committee appeared reluctant to make a clear connection between particular accountability measures

(such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework) and a diminution of academic freedom. However, it did acknowledge that multiple initiatives can work together to create problems and there is a need to recognise that '*it is the totality and overall atmosphere that a constellation of laws, policies and practices can create*' (ibid, p. 31).

The report also noted, if obliquely, that there was little evidence that organisations representing higher education personnel had had any meaningful involvement in the design of accountability mechanisms and made the case for increased social dialogue around these issues to ensure that the concerns of UCU and others were addressed. The report further suggested that '*the various quality assurance mechanisms established in recent years appear to present some vulnerabilities to both political interference and deference to market-driven priorities' (ibid, p. 32). The report continued by asserting that 'Robust democratic governance and social dialogue on these mechanisms would be the surest means to minimize these risks*' (ibid).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Joint Committee asserted that 'tenure or its functional equivalent' needed to be protected, but that in the UK the problem of precarity was very real and that it sought to '*encourage the Government to address growing employment insecurity among higher-education teaching personnel*' (ibid, p. 33), not least by '*enhancing policy measures that safeguard tenure or its functional equivalent*' (ibid, p. 34). In this sense the Joint Committee placed a clear responsibility on the government to take action, directly challenging the government's own claim that in an autonomous system, these were matters for individual institutions and not government.

Reflections on the outcomes and lessons to be learned

The Joint Committee's findings and recommendations were less than the union had hoped for, but not unexpected. Given the nature of the Joint Committee and the complex nature of the case, it was argued that it would be unrealistic to expect more unambiguous statements in the recommendations. Exhortations to participate in more social dialogue are welcome but remain limited in their impact if governments are adamant that it is not their responsibility

to do so and hence refuse to engage. That said, the union was very clear that the Joint Committee's statements on the extent of, and problems associated with, the widespread use of precarious contracts were seen as very helpful, and an important aid to union campaigns against casualised working.

With hindsight, the union official responsible for developing and presenting the allegation felt the submission may have benefitted from closer links to UCU's wider strategic goals in higher education. The initial focus on academic freedom emerged from a real and understandable threat identified by senior union activists and officials, but it was suggested that this had not emerged from a felt need being experienced by members. The initiative to take the union's case to CEART was therefore not one based on a need identified by members (despite the findings of the research report) and it was clear, given the complex relationship between government policies and threats to academic freedom, that the union needed to undertake more educational work with its own members about the nature of the issues (this was also a recommendation in the Karran and Mallinson report). It was suggested that the issue, and the process, were experienced as a somewhat discrete, stand-alone issue in the union's policy agenda, rather than being seen as integral to, and integrated with, the union's wider campaigns on issues such as precarious contracts. Making these connections more explicit may have helped raise the profile of the allegation with members.

In 2018, the union found itself in a major conflict over proposed cuts to pensions in older universities, and by 2019 its 'four fights' dispute (focused on pay, workload, equalities issues and casualisation) was consuming the attention of the union's higher education sector. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also preoccupied the union's staff and membership. This left little time or resources to commit to other issues, and communication with members about the CEART process became crowded out by other issues. This was perhaps an opportunity missed as the allegation's focus on casualisation was a core concern of the four-fights campaign, and the CEART process may have been presented as another element of the union's wider strategy involving not only collective bargaining and industrial action but also raising the issues with international bodies. Reconciling timing and contexts can be difficult (industrial action

is typically quite immediate and short-term, whereas the CEART process is the opposite), but there may be possibilities to bring the two into some alignment.

The union was able to make use of the report subsequently when the discussion about freedom of speech and academic freedom in the UK became very polarised, often in ways that sought to blame some academics for closing down academic freedom. The UCU official commented:

> *While the media were focused on 'cancel culture' and campus speakers, we were able to highlight the key role played by the UK government and university employers in undermining academic freedom. By taking a case to the ILO and UNESCO, it was an opportunity to show members that the union was taking academic freedom seriously.*

Furthermore, UCU's experience of the CEART process also highlights the benefits of a process that opens up different opportunities to raise and advocate for issues through routes that can appear closed down within national contexts. It is unrealistic to expect the CEART process to provide a solution to a problem that has proven intractable at the national level, but within a strategic approach that sees the CEART process as one part of an integrated strategy then it is possible to see considerable benefits of exploiting the

opportunity that this mechanism provides. The union was also able to utilise the Joint Committee findings when seeking to influence the content of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, 2023 as the legislation raised several issues that impacted academic freedom. This further illustrated the potential to use the CEART process to promote union agendas across a wide range of issues and in a diverse set of contexts.

Reviewing the case studies: conclusions

A close reading of the case studies presented will show clearly that a decision about whether or not to lodge an allegation with ILO/UNESCO requires careful consideration. The CEART Joint Committee does not typically produce unambiguous recommendations and all the interviewees highlighted the likelihood that any outcome is likely to be a complex compromise of competing arguments.

However, the interviewees unanimously agreed that submitting their allegation had been worthwhile. As the official from DM asked rhetorically – 'why wouldn't you do it?'. Clearly, there are resource issues to consider, but these were not assessed as substantial, with some significant potential benefits.

The principal benefit identified by interviewees was the opportunity provided by the process to compel the relevant government to address concerns raised by the union, and in a forum that is not only public but international. Forcing governments to have to explain themselves in such a way was seen as an important development, particularly in cases where domestic governments had found it relatively easy to evade even responding to, let alone addressing, the union's concerns.

Moreover, although the unions were generally frustrated by the caution contained in the CEART recommendations, all of them acknowledged that there were several findings and/or recommendations that they considered enormously helpful. For example, in the case of UCU, CEART acknowledged the scale of the problem relating to precarious contracts and this did provide the union with useful political capital. Similarly for DM, the CEART report recognised the link between new management arrangements and potential impacts on academic freedom, with that concern being subsequently vindicated. For CONADU, issues relating to victimisation and intimidation of academic staff was recognised, and the issues were addressed. In all cases, the CEART allegation had helped to 'shift the discourse' and this often resulted in positive change, even if this did not always appear directly linked to the Joint Committee's recommendations.

The value that was identified by interviewees therefore was the benefit of being able to open up 'another front' in union campaigns around the issues that were important to it. The question was not posed in either/or terms – member mobilisation or a CEART allegation? Collective bargaining or a CEART allegation? But rather how can a CEART allegation help build leverage in a 'multi-front' campaign that will involve a range of different approaches and methods? In this sense, a CEART allegation is not a distraction from other methods being adopted by the union, but rather a complement to such methods that offers different ways to both engage members and pressure employers.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that it is not always necessary to lodge a formal allegation to utilise the process and that in the survey a significant proportion of unions (82%) that were aware of the *1997 Recommendation* and the CEART process utilised the Recommendation's content, and sometimes the threat of an allegation, in their engagements with employers and governments.

Reviewing the CEART process: three issues to address

The *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* (ILO, 2024) called for a strengthened mandate for CEART. Based on the experiences presented in the three case studies, here we identify three possible areas of reform.

Reinforcing impact

As the *1997 instrument* is a 'Recommendation' (as per the *1966 instrument* for teachers) it is not a legal mechanism, and CEART cannot enforce compliance. This may be perceived as a limitation, but some of the flexibilities it confers must also be considered as an advantage. The challenge lies in adopting practices that can support compliance by reinforcing the impact of CEART outcomes. This could in part be achieved by increasing awareness of the relevant instruments, but in particular giving more visibility to CEART outcomes and recommendations. Research conducted for this report highlighted the importance of 'process visibility' for putting pressure on governments and employers to respond to actions recommended by CEART, and any steps that can enhance this visibility should be viewed as a positive development.

Maintaining pressure on governments to respond to CEART outcomes should be an important priority.

Ensuring transparency

Those union officials who were interviewed for this report were frequently frustrated by what was described as a remote, bureaucratic and somewhat faceless process. CEART meets infrequently (every three years) and for a short time. Submissions to CEART are presented as written documents, and there is no in-person exchange between either CEART members and the union lodging the allegation, or between CEART and the government of the relevant country. There is no facility to invite third parties (in-country experts for example) to contribute evidence, and this can make it easy for governments to dismiss union allegations as simply a disagreement over policy.

All of these issues could be improved, but this would require strengthening CEART both constitutionally (providing it with more formal authority to require timely submissions for example) and in terms of resources (allowing the body to investigate issues more thoroughly). One very practical proposal to enhance transparency would be to include a nominee from Education International (EI) on the Joint Committee.

Addressing system governance issues

A more complex issue to address, but one that was highlighted repeatedly by the interviewees, and that emerged from CEART's own reports, is related to higher education system governance and the ownership of responsibility. Governments are the signatories to the *Recommendation*, and so CEART's exchanges with the 'employer side' are only with the government (typically the Ministry responsible for higher education). However, in all the case studies investigated for this report (Denmark, Argentina and the UK), government ministries responded by claiming the issues were not their responsibility and that it would be inappropriate for them to intervene in matters that were the responsibility of individual institutions. All of these points attest to the increasing complexity of higher education governance in ways that increase opacity and diminish democratic accountability. It is not clear what the appropriate reform might be, but unless CEART is able to intervene at the point where accountability actually lies, then its influence is potentially limited. At a time when concerns about institutional governance, and linked issues of academic freedom, are growing, this is an important issue to address.

References

AAUP (American Association of University Professors) (2023). *Annual report on the economic status of the profession, 2022-2023*. *https://www.aaup. org/report/annual-report-economic-status- profession-2022-23*

AFT (2024). *Common sense guardrails for using advanced technology in schools*. *https://www.aft. org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2024/ Commonsense_Guardrails_AI_0604.pdf*

Andersen, H. (2017). *Forskningsfrihed. Ideal og virkelighed*. Hans Reitzels Forlag. [Title translates to English as *Freedom of Research: Ideals and Reality*].

Arantes, J., & Vicars, M. (2024). Always on standby: acknowledging the psychosocial risk of our postdigital presence in online digital labour in higher education. *Higher Education Research and Development, 43*(3), 606-619. *https://doi.org/10.10 80/07294360.2023.2280209*

BBC (2024, April 24). *Buenos Aires: Thousands protest against education cuts*. BBC online. *https:// www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america- 68886411#:~:text=Tens%20of%20thousands%20 of%20people,a%20chainsaw%20to%20public%20 spending.*

Brantley, A. & Shomaker, R. (2021). *Higher education workforce: Challenges and opportunities*. CUPA- HR. *https://www.cupahr.org/wp-content/uploads/ KC/CUPA-HR-Higher-Ed-Workforce-Challenges- Opportunities-2021.pdf*

Brower, A., & James, A. (2020). Research performance and age explain less than half of the gender pay gap in New Zealand universities. *PLoS ONE, 15*(1). *https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0226392*

Brown, M., Skerritt, C., Shevlin, P., McNamara, G., & O'Hara, J. (2022). Deconstructing the challenges and opportunities for blended learning in the post emergency learning era. *Irish Educational Studies, 41*(1), 71-84. *https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2 021.2022526*

Colby, G., & Bai, Z. (2023). *A path toward equity for women faculty in higher education*. TIAA Institute. *https://www.tiaa.org/content/dam/tiaa/institute/ pdf/insights-report/2023-03/tiaa-institute-a-path- toward-equity-for-women-faculty-wvoee-colby-bai- march-2023.pdf*

CONADU (2024, April 30). *Informe: Por qué el conflicto universitario no está solucionado*. IEC CONADU. *https://www.feduba.org.ar/2024/05/12/ por-que-el-conflicto-universitario-no-esta- solucionado/#:~:text=Compartimos%20el%20 informe%20del%20Instituto%20de%20 Estudios%20y,las%20universidades%20 nacionales.%20El%20presupuesto%20 universitario%20sigue%20congelado*

DfE (2022). *Future opportunities for education technology in England*. *https://assets.publishing.service. gov.uk/media/629f2065e90e070395bb3e4c/ Future_opportunities_for_education_technology_in_ England_June_2022.pdf*

DM (2008, May 22). Complaint: Submission to UNESCO by DM.

Evans, D. K., & Yuan, F. (2018). *The working conditions of teachers in low and middle income countries*. The World Bank. *https://teachertaskforce.org/sites/ default/files/2023-09/2018_Evans-al_Teacher- working-conditions-in-low-and-middle-income- countries_EN_cover_.pdf*

Fassina, R. (2024, June 4). *A spark of hope: The fight for public education in Argentina*. LSE Atlantic Fellows. *https://afsee.atlanticfellows.lse.ac.uk/en-gb/blogs/ a-spark-of-hope-the-fight-for-public-education-in- argentina*

Fugger, J. (2022, October 31). *The Impact of Book Bans on Higher Education*. Social Science Space. *https:// www.socialsciencespace.com/2022/10/the-impact- of-book-bans-on-higher-ed/*

Garritzmann, J. (2024). *Higher education funding across the globe: An overview on funding of higher and further education and research, its political and socio-economic causes, and some consequences, across the globe*. Education International. *https:// www.ei-ie.org/en/item/28580:higher-education- funding-across-the-globe*

Haider, J., Söderström, K. R., Ekström, B., & Rödl, M. (2024). GPT fabricated scientific papers on Google Scholar: Key features, spread and implications for pre-empting evidence manipulation. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. *https://doi. org/10.37016/mr-2020-156*

Hancock, L. (2020). Commercialization and corporatization: Academic freedom and autonomy under constraints in Australian universities. In Z. Hao, & P. Zabielskis (Eds.), *Academic freedom under siege: Higher education in East Asia, the ¬U.S. and Australia* (pp.219-246). Springer.

IFUT (2023). *Precarious employment in higher education*. IFUT Research. *https://www.ifut.ie/sites/default/files/publications/public/report/2023//ifutsurveyfinalcompressed.pdf*

ILO (2009). *Joint ILO-UNESCO Committee of Experts on the application of the recommendations concerning teaching personnel (CEART): Report on allegations submitted by teachers' organizations*. ILO.

ILO (2016). T*he ILO/UNESCO recommendation concerning the status of teachers (1966) and the UNESCO recommendation concerning the status of Higher-Education teaching personnel (1997)* – Revised edition 2016. International Labour Office.

ILO (2024). *United Nations Secretary General's high-level panel on the teaching profession*. ILO/UN/UNESCO. *https://www.ilo.org/industries-and-sectors/education-sector/united-nations-secretary-generals-high-level-panel-teaching-profession*

ILO (online). *Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the application of the recommendations concerning teaching personnel*. ILO. *https://www.ilo.org/industries-and-sectors/education-sector/joint-ilounesco-committee-experts-application-recommendations-concerning*

ILO/UNESCO (2021). *Final report: Fourteenth session. Joint ILO-UNESCO Committee of Experts on the application of the recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel*. ILO. *https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_837723.pdf*

infobae (2024, 27 May). *El Gobierno acordó con las universidades un aumento del 270% en los gastos de funcionamiento*. *https://www.infobae.com/educacion/2024/05/27/el-gobierno-le-ofrecio-a-las-universidades-un-aumento-del-270-en-los-gastos-de-funcionamiento-y-habria-acuerdo/*

INOMICS (2022). *Salary report 2022: Annual economics job market review*. INOMICS GmbH. *https://inomics.com/sites/default/files/INOMICS_Salary_Report/inomics_salary_report_2022.pdf*

Intel online (n.d.). *Technologies to enable Artificial Intelligence in higher education*. *https://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/education/highered/artificial-intelligence.html#:~:text=AI%20in%20Higher%20Education%20Takeaways,generative%20AI%2C%20and%20computer%20vision*

Karran, T., & Mallinson, L. (2017). *Academic freedom in the UK: Legal and normative protection in a comparative context*. *https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8614/Academic-Freedom-in-the-UK-Legal-and-Normative-Protection-in-a-Comparative-Context-Report-for-UCU-Terence-Karran-and-Lucy-Mallinson-May-17/pdf/ucu_academicfreedomstudy_report_may17.pdfxiong*

Karran, T., Beiter, K., & Appiagyei-Atua, K. (2017). Measuring academic freedom in Europe: a criterion referenced approach. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 1*(2), 209–239. *https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2017.1307093*

Kissoon, C., & Karran, T. (2024). *Academic Freedom in the Digital University*. UCU. *https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/14406/Academic_Freedom_in_the_Digital_University_Report/pdf/Academic_Freedom_in_the_Digital_University_Report.pdf*

Komljenovic, J., & Williamson, B. (2024). Behind the platforms. Safeguarding intellectual property rights and academic freedom in Higher Education. Education International. *https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/28484:behind-the-platforms-safeguarding-intellectual-property-rights-and-academic-freedom-in-higher-education#:~:text=The%20headline%20finding%20of%20this,different%20governance%20and%20copyright%20regimes*

Kuhn, C., Khoo, S.-M., Czerniewicz, L., Lilley, W., Bute, S., Crean, A., Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Sinfield, S., Jandrić, P., Knox, J., & MacKenzie, A. (2023). Understanding Digital Inequality: A Theoretical Kaleidoscope. *Postdigital Science and Education*. Springer. *https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-023-00395-8*

Makoni, M. (2018, April 20). *Academics earn some of the best salaries in Commonwealth*. University World News. *https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180417135318863*

Marshall, S., Blaj-Ward, L., Dreamson, N., Nyanjom, J., & Bertoul, M.T. (2024). The reshaping of higher education: Technological impacts, pedagogical change and future projections. *Higher Education Research and Development, 43*(3), 521-541. *https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2329393*

Meehan, K., Friedman, J., Magnusson, T., & Baêta, S. (2023). *Banned in the USA. State laws supercharge book suppression in schools*. Pen America. *https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-supercharge-book-suppression-in-schools/*

Misculin, N. (2024, April 24). *Argentina's Milei faces biggest protest yet as students march over budget cuts*. Reuters. *https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentinas-milei-faces-biggest-protest-yet-students-march-over-budget-cuts-2024-04-23/*

Ogden, E. (2023). *Comparative Study of Higher Education Academic Staff Terms and Conditions*. Higher Education Policy Institute, SUMS Consulting. *https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Comparative-Study-of-Higher-Education-Academic-Staff-Terms-and-Conditions.pdf*

Rea, J. (2021). Precarious work and funding make academic freedom precarious. *Australian Universities' Review, 63*(1), 26-30.

Regeringen (2003). Nye veje mellem forskning og erhverv - fra tanke til faktura. *https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2003/filer-2003/nye-veje-mellem-forskning-og-erhverv-fra-tanke-til-faktura.pdf* . Significantly, the English version of the document was published with a different title – see *https://ufm.dk/en/publications/2003/new-ways-of-interaction-between-research-and-industry-2013-turning-science-into-business/?set_language=en*

Samaniego, C., Lindner, P., Kazmi, M.A., Dirr, B.A., Dejun, T. K., Evonzia, J., & Spitzmueller, C. (2023). Higher research productivity = more pay? Gender pay-for-productivity inequity across disciplines. *Scientometrics, 128*, 1395–1407. *https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-022-04513-4*

Scholars at Risk Network (n.d.) *Peace petition scholars, Turkey*. *https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academics-for-peace-turkey/*

Selkrig, M. Dulfur, N., & Smith, C. (2024). Capturing the shifting work of teaching in higher education through postcards of practice. *Higher Education Research and Development, 43*(3), 591-605. *https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2293192*

Solomon, S, & Du Plessis, M. (2023). Experiences of precarious work within Higher Education *Institutions: A qualitative evidence synthesis. Frontiers in Education, 8*. *https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.960649*

Stevenson, H., Carter, B., Milner, A., & Vega Castillo, M.A. (2020). *Your turn! Teachers for Trade Union renewal*. ETUCE. *https://www.csee-etuce.org/en/projects/your-turn-teachers-for-trade-union-renewal/3442-introduction*

Stevenson, H., Hagger-Vaughan, L., Milner, A., & Winchip, E. (2017). Education and training policy in the European Semester: Public investment, public policy, social dialogue and privatisation patterns across Europe. ETUCE. *https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/25714:education-and-training-policy-in-the-european-semester-public-investment-public-policy-social-dialogue-and-privatisation-patterns-across-europe*

Stevenson, H., & Selechopoulou, V.E. (2022). *European sectoral social partners in education: Promoting quality of academic teaching and management*. European Federation of Education Employers. *https://www.csee-etuce.org/en/resources/publications/4939-research-report-european-sectoral-social-partners-in-education-promoting-quality-of-academic-teaching-and-management-2022*

Stromquist, N. P. (2017). *Twenty years later: International efforts to protect the rights of higher education teaching personnel remain insufficient*. Education International. *https://main.ei-ie.org/en/item/25799:twenty-years-later-international-efforts-to-protect-the-rights-of-higher-education-teaching-personnel-remain-insufficient#:~:text=Members%20only-,Twenty%20years%20later%3A%20International%20efforts%20to%20protect%20the%20rights%20of,education%20teaching%20personnel%20remain%20insufficient&text=The%20prevailing%20discourse%20on%20higher,equity%E2%80%94all%20centered%20on%20students*

Suiter, J. (2016). Post-truth politics. *Political Insight, 7*(3), 25-27. *https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905816680417*

Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. Harper Colins.

Thompson, G. (2021). *The global report on the status of teachers*. Education International. *https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/25403:the-global-report-on-the-status-of-teachers-2021*

Tooze, W. (2022 October 28). Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. *Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33*

UCU (2019). *Allegation by the UCU against the UK government in respect to non-compliance with the 1997 UNESCO recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel. Submission to the UNESCO/ILO committee of experts on the application of the recommendations concerning teaching personnel, by the UK University and College Union*. UCU. *https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10122/UCU-submission-to-UNESCOILO-concerning-teaching-personnel/pdf/UK_CEART_Submission_UCU_Jan2019.pdf*

UCU (2021) *Home Office independent review of Prevent: Submission from the University and College Union*. UCU. *https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12452/Prevent-review-UCU-response-May-21/pdf/UCU_Prevent_review_-_May_2021.pdf*

UCU (2023). *Precarious work in higher education: Insecure contracts how they have changed over time*. UCU. *https://www.ucu.org.uk/heprecarity*

UCU Scotland (2020). *The automatic university: A review of datafication and automation in higher education*. *https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10947/ The-automatic-university/pdf/ucus_the-automatic- university_jun20.pdf*

UFM (2009). *The university evaluation 2009: Evaluation report*. Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. *https://ufm.dk/en/publications/2009/ danish-university-evaluation-2009*

UNESCO (1997). *Recommendation concerning the status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*. UNESCO. *https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/ recommendation-concerning-status-higher- education-teaching-personnel*

UNESCO (2023). *Welcome to the UIS data browser*. *https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/*

Usher, A. (2024). *Global trends in public tertiary funding outside of Europe*. Higher Education Strategy Associates. *https://www.eua.eu/images/FF_2024_ presentations/Plenary_I_Alex_Usher.pdf*

Weingarten, R. (2025, 8 May). Higher education under attack. *Education International: Worlds of Education*. *https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/29848:higher- education-under-attack*

Williams, J., & Usher, A. (2022). *World Higher Education: Institutions, students and funding*. Higher Education Strategy Associates. *https://higheredstrategy.com/ world-higher-education-institutions-students-and- funding/*

Williamson, B., & Hogan, A. (2021). *Pandemic privatisation in higher education: Edtech and university reform*. Education International. *https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/25245:pandemic- privatisation-in-higher-education-edtech- university-reform*

Woods, H. R. (2024, April 8). Universities are in crisis. *New Statesman*. *https://www.newstatesman.com/ comment/2024/04/university-funding-is-in-crisis*

World Economic Forum (2024, February 26). *These 5 Key trends will shape the EdTech market up to 2030*. World Economic Forum. *https://www.weforum.org/ agenda/2024/02/these-are-the-4-key-trends-that- will-shape-the-edtech-market-into-2030/*

Wray, S., & Kinman, G. (2021). *Supporting staff wellbeing in higher education*. Education Support. *https:// www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/x4jdvxpl/es- supporting-staff-wellbeing-in-he-report.pdf*

Education International
Internationale de l'Education
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale

Head office

15 Boulevard Bischoffsheim
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32-2 224 0611
headoffice@ei-ie.org
www.ei-ie.org
#unite4ed

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites teachers and education employees.