Education International Research

In the eye of the storm:

Higher education in an age of crises

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

June 2025

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

Higher education in an age of crises

In 2024 the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession* produced its report and recommendations (ILO, 2024). The report highlighted the many challenges that now face those who work in education systems, from pre-primary through to higher education (HE). The report also contained 59 recommendations to help address the issues it identified.

A key proposal of the High-Level Panel is to adopt a revised, and updated, instrument in relation to the *ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers* (1966) and the *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* (1997). These are international standard setting instruments that cover 'the most important professional, social, ethical and material concerns of teachers' (UNESCO, 2002) with the 1997 Recommendation specifically focused on the higher education sector (both the 1966 and 1997 *Recommendations* are reproduced together in ILO, 2016).

The call for a revised, and updated, instrument recognised the rapidly changing environment in which those who are employed in educational institutions undertake their work. It was accompanied

by a recommendation from the High-Level Panel to develop a 'strengthened mandate' for the body responsible for monitoring and promoting the standard setting instruments – the *Committee of Experts on the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teaching Personnel* (CEART).

In this report we focus on issues highlighted in the *1997 Recommendation*, and identify developments in these areas that are evident in the higher education sector globally, mostly focusing on the period since the CEART meeting of 2021. As our report demonstrates, the scale of changes being experienced, the pace at which they are transforming the HE sector, and the profoundly uncertain, and unstable, global context in which higher education institutions (HEIs) are functioning, all provide a powerful justification for strengthening the *1997 Recommendation*. High quality public higher education, available on an equal basis to all, has enormous potential to transform individual lives, while contributing at a societal level to tackling global challenges. However, higher education workers depend on a wider environment that supports, rather than undermines, this work. At the current time this global environment is shaped by multiple colliding crises – or polycrisis, which in turn, drives many individual higher education institutions into their own crisis. There are multiple factors that contribute to this state of affairs, but in the report we highlight three issues that combine together to create what we refer to as a 'Triple A' crisis rating:

- **Austerity:** higher education institutions frequently function with inadequate financial support, with cuts in real terms funding that often date back to the 2007/08 global financial crisis, compounded by recent inflationary shocks and the flaws of funding models that are not fit for purpose.
- **Authoritarianism:** there is a global growth in authoritarianism as 'strong state solutions' are invoked to address long-term, complex societal challenges. Institutions of higher education often find themselves at the centre of these developments as governments seek to assert increased control over what is researched and what can be taught.
- **Automation:** new technologies are developing rapidly, and are unrecognisable from what was available when the *1997 Recommendation* was adopted. Much of this technology is developed within higher education institutions, and has the potential to bring considerable benefits – but there are also substantial risks. Without an adequate regulatory framework, new technologies, in particular those associated with Artificial Intelligence (AI), can undermine academic freedom, drive a standardised and impersonal student experience and undermine staff working conditions.

In the full report we provide further details on how the above factors, and a range of linked issues, are combining to frame the conditions in which higher education personnel undertake their work. The report is based on a review of published research (research reports, peer-reviewed journals, commissioned studies), a survey of member organisations of Education International that represent higher education staff, and interviews with officials of EI member organisations with direct experience of the relevant issues. For further details of all data sources, and a complete list of references, please consult the full report. In this executive summary we provide a summary of the key issues.

The global higher education context: current issues and future challenges

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 is reiterated in the recommendations of the *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession*.

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 relative annual growth in the Global South is higher. Global North countries are typically not aiming to expand on this scale but this trend also reflects the very low base from which much funding in the Global South starts from historically.

Levels of spending between countries on higher education are very uneven - the percentage of national GDP allocated to tertiary education varies from 0.016 to 2.77% (UNESCO, 2023). On average, globally, governments spend 0.83% of GDP on higher education. 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.

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 government spending.

Privatisation and commercialisation in higher education

Issues of public, and private funding, open up wider questions about privatisation and commercialisation trends in higher education. The *1997 Recommendation*, in part reflecting an environment in which the dominance of public provision was largely assumed, clearly identified working in higher education 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. 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.

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).

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 (AI) 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.

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. This commitment is reaffirmed by 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).

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). Several reports note that the erosion of real terms pay is feeding into recruitment problems, in particular in disciplines and fields where private sector pay is much more attractive. High inflation rates have also impacted the value of pensions.

Alongside real value salary erosion the gender pay gap in the higher education sector remains substantial. One report focusing on a single discipline globally, found a 27.8% pay disparity between male and female academics worldwide (INOMICS, 2022). 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. An earlier study across African HEIs, 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).

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.

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 commitment is reiterated by the *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).

A recent report from the UK (Ogden, 2023) suggests that the report by Thompson (2021) may understate the scale of the problem, certainly in some countries. This report indicated that 33% of staff are employed on fixed-term contracts. The proportion of 'research-only' staff on fixed-term contracts rose to 68%. 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.

A study by Solomon and Du Plessis (2023) 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. (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023, p. 12)*

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 reflecting the time when they were published. Much has changed since.

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'.

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 questions of academic integrity, a surge in AI generated 'fake science' articles that have appeared on Google Scholar (Haider et al., 2024), and growing digital inequalities (Kuhn et al., 2023).

Research reports highlight a trend towards increased standardisation (in contrast to the claims of greater personalisation) and the emergence of 'digital fatigue' that have profound effects on the work-life balance and, ultimately, psycho-social health of higher education personnel. New technologies risk blurring the traditional distinctions between work and home and drive a feeling of being 'always on standby' (Arantes & Vicars, 2024, p. 606), a trend that is deemed 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 become increasingly complex as edtech platforms become a new player in the 'ownership debate' between the higher education institution and the employee. 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, 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.*

The development and adoption of AI at scale, without an appropriate regulatory framework, threatens to further wrestle higher education away from the values of public higher education. Ensuring robust regulatory frameworks, and safeguards provided by ensuring these issues are included in collective bargaining, will be essential protections moving forward.

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* and alongside academic freedom, related issues include institutional autonomy, collegial governance and the importance of social dialogue and collective bargaining.

In all these areas, considerable concerns were raised about an erosion of relevant standards.

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.

During the time this report was being produced, developments in Argentina and the United States provided dramatic evidence of how governments were using multiple methods, including budget cuts to individual institutions, to curtail the research and teaching activity of scholars.

Alongside cuts to budgets (BBC, 2024), the abuse of precarious contracts (Rea, 2021) and the increased (mis)use of technology (Kissoon & Karran, 2024) also 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 appear to be accelerating. 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.

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.

What is clear 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.

Conclusion: considering a revised instrument for higher education personnel

This executive summary 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.

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 the report, 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. It is apparent 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. The direct threats to academic freedom arising from the rise in authoritarian governance must be treated as the serious threat that they represent. A revised instrument must address these issues.

The changing impact of technology in education

Technology has developed apace since the publication of the *1997 Recommendation* and 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, without adequate regulatory frameworks 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), as well as disabled workers (paragraph 71). 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.

A revised instrument can make a significant contribution to defending initiatives intended to promote equalities, that at the current time, look increasingly vulnerable to challenges from governments and other authorities hostile to these commitments.

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). Hence the need to adopt a wellbeing focus in any revised instrument to ensure an integrated and holistic approach to improving working conditions.

The UNESCO Recommendation 1997 and its application through the work of the 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* (CEART).

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 for the Committee to continue to provide a key role in ensuring the *Recommendations* both retain and extend their relevance and credibility.

In the full report we seek to 'open up' the workings of CEART by providing detailed case studies of three trade unions representing higher education workers, who have lodged allegations with CEART. These are:

- ***DM*** (Denmark) – allegation lodged in 2008
- ***Federación Nacional de Docentes Universitarios*** (CONADU, Argentina) – allegation lodged in 2018
- ***University and College Union*** (UCU, UK) – allegation lodged in 2019.

It is important to note that all three allegations focused on questions of collegial governance and academic freedom. In the report the case studies are based on interviews with key union officials involved in developing and submitting their union's allegation. All the interviewees unanimously agreed that submitting their allegation had been worthwhile. 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 not wholly satisfied with the outcomes, all of them acknowledged that there were several findings and/or

recommendations from the Committee 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.

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. In the full report we provide examples of unions that have made use of the *1997 Recommendation* in their negotiations with governments and employers, without ever formally lodging an allegation.

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, 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 in the case studies, 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

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/10.1080/07294360.2023.2280209

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%20of%20people,a%20chainsaw%20to%20public%20spending.

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

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

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

ILO (2016). *The 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

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

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

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.

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

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

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 (2002). The 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the status of teachers : what is it and who should use it? https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000126086

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

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

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/

Education International Research

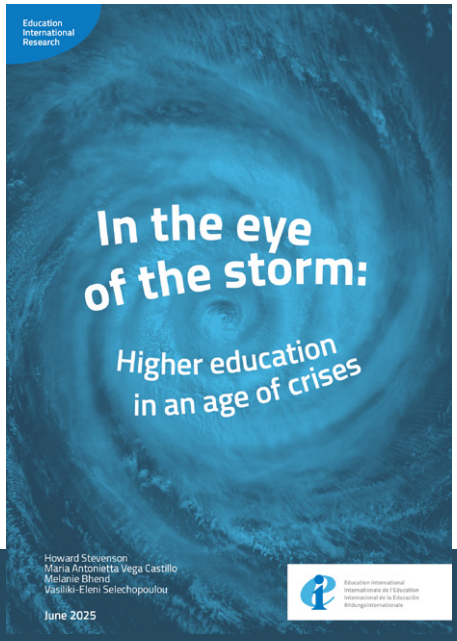
In the eye of the storm:

Higher education in an age of crises

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

June 2025



To get the full paper:
https://eiie.io/2025HEAgeOfCrises

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