Global education industry capitalises on pandemic crisis

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Education International has launched ground-breaking new research that maps the extent of private actors' influence in education since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research has been commissioned as part of Education International's Global Response to the commercialisation and privatisation of education.

The report, Commercialisation and privatisation in/of education in the context of COVID-19, shows that the global education industry is capitalising on the education crisis.

Since school closures, there has been a huge upsurge in profitmaking for education technology (edtech) companies. Commercial companies have increased their involvement in public education through entering into new pandemic networks — multi-stakeholder coalitions including edtech companies, major transnational corporations, international organisations such as UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank, national governments and others.

The authors of the research, Ben Williamson (Edinburgh University) and Anna Hogan (Queensland University), presented their research findings in a virtual webinar on 10 July for education unions globally.

The pivot to distance learning has allowed private actors to position themselves at the centre of essential education services — not just as a response to the crisis and the need for emergency remote teaching — but for the long term.

Opening the webinar, Education International's President, Susan Hopgood, noted: "As every education system around the world, attempts to navigate the multiple crises (health, economic, social), the challenge of providing quality teaching and learning in this context is tough, and the allure of handing over responsibility to the private sector is strong."

However, no matter the crisis, "governments cannot shirk their responsibility to provide quality education for all, as enshrined in international law and necessitated by international commitments" and underlined that as unions, "it is our role and responsibility to ensure that governments fulfil their obligation in the provision of quality public education, so that the right to education is fulfilled for every child".

Unions involved highlighted the need to work together to defend public education from being "reimagined" by corporate edtech.

According to Education International's General Secretary, David Edwards: "This webinar is just the beginning of the discussion. As education unions, we need to continue to analyse, strategise, plan, organise collectively,

and use our strength as a global movement to confront the radical shift in the global education landscape that is occurring as we speak."

A summary of key findings of the research and the full report can be [found here](#).

This is an edited version of an article that appeared on the [Education International website](#).