



2025 Annual Conference
Wednesday 23 - Friday 25 April
University of Manchester



PRESIDENTIAL EVENT

WEDNESDAY 23 APRIL 2025
17:15 – 18:15

THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Jana Bacevic, Durham University, **Janja Komljenovic**, University of Edinburgh,
Aline Courtois, University of Bath

The past academic year has been marked by crises in higher education. Within the UK, numerous universities have faced challenging financial circumstances, with sociologists often bearing the brunt of voluntary and, in some cases, compulsory redundancies, and students are graduating with increasing levels of debt. While the incoming Labour government has expressed some sympathy with the plight of universities, and has been more welcoming of international students than its predecessor, no action has yet been taken to address the deep-seated problems the sector faces.

Informed by this context, this session explores what the future holds for higher education – from three different, yet intertwined, standpoints. First, drawing on a political economy perspective, Jana Bacevic (Durham University) questions whether higher education is sustainable in light of the climate crisis and widespread extractivist practices. Second, Janja Komljenovic (University of Edinburgh) explores the likely impact of digital infrastructures and technologies on higher education, including the increasing dominance of BigTech and value capture by private sector companies. Third, Aline Courtois (University of Bath) considers changing migration infrastructures, the changing landscape of international higher education, and diversification in the profiles of internationally-mobile students — and the implications of these for the future of higher education. All three speakers will examine how we might envision a more ethical and equitable future.

Chair: Rachel Brooks, University of Oxford, BSA President