Digital Futures?
BSA Presidential Event 2018

22 November 2018
Churchill Room, The Treasury, Whitehall, LONDON

-------------------------- SPEAKER PROFILE --------------------------

BEN WILLIAMSON

Title: Digital universities? Opening up discussion between policy and sociology about data-driven, student-centred higher education

Bio: Dr Ben Williamson is a Chancellor's Fellow at the Research Centre in Digital Education and the Edinburgh Futures Institute at the University of Edinburgh. He researches digital technologies and data in education policy and practice, currently focusing on the uses of student data in higher education and the rise of big data projects in educational genomics and neuroscience.

Statement

Digital data are transforming how sectors and services across societies are understood, opening up spaces for policy officials and social scientists to produce new approaches to social data and its consequences. Current debates about the future of higher education are characterised by political reforms to make the sector more data-driven, competitive, and student-centred, and by sociological concerns about performance measurement, market-style comparison, and the treatment of students as consumers. This event is a key opportunity to generate productive discussion between policy officials and social scientists about the potential, controversies and challenges of expanding data systems in higher education, in particular by exploring the possibilities and limits of using digital data for evaluating universities and shaping student choices.

Selected publications

During my ongoing study of the development of new student data systems in higher education, I have written a series of research updates providing detailed background to my presentation:

- [Mapping the data infrastructure of market reform in higher education (8 January 2018)](#)
- [The Office for Students as the data scientist of the higher education sector (26 April 2018)](#)
- [The mutating metric machinery of higher education (26 September 2018)](#)