

Title: **The impact of conference participation on academic practice**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- identify what processes at academic development conferences can make a difference to individual and institutional practice
- consider how they could use the research outcomes in planning, organising or in preparing to participate in future institutional or national conferences

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Why do we participate in academic development conferences? Do they impact on our practice or that of colleagues? What is it about conference sessions which positively affect our attitudes and approaches? Participants at this session – whether conference organisers or conference participants - will be able to learn and to share what works, why it works and what processes at conferences can make a difference to individual and institutional practice.

We have are conducting this research in this area after several years' experience planning national conferences with the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) as well as local conferences in our own institutions. We were aware from our conversations, evaluations and experiences what most participants valued but found there was a dearth of evidential research. This is surprising given how conferences can enable one of the main purposes of academic development: 'informed debate about learning, teaching, assessment, curriculum design, and the goals of higher education' Gosling (2001). An investigation was clearly due – and particularly given the actual and opportunity costs involved in conference participation. We reported on our preliminary work in 2010 (Campbell and Popovic), and then commenced the research which is the subject of this session to investigate and identify systematically what works best.

This session will enable participants to engage with the outcomes of research into the impact of participation in conferences on academic practice. Evaluations of impact took place with participants at over five international conferences (including Australia, America, UK and Canada) and over 10 UK institutional conferences held between June 2011 and September

2012. After attending one of these conferences, colleagues completed an online questionnaire detailing the sessions they felt made a difference and why. Follow-on interviews were held some months later with a randomised selection of respondents evaluated if any impact has resulted and, how the conference participation prompted this and what else enabled or prevented hoped-for change. We will report and on finding from both these investigations and encourage participants to reflect on the outcomes and to share their own practices and approaches in relation to conference planning and participation.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The 90 minute workshop will comprise:

10 mins

What has made a difference to me here?

Quick fire contribution of SEDA participant experiences

10 mins

What we value in conferences.

Short video of participants at a former SEDA conference

20 mins

The impact of conference participation on academic practice.

Brief outline of research and outcomes.

30 mins

Your views of conferences: what has made a difference and why?

Group discussion in which participants share their views, approaches and practices.

20 mins

What now?

Concluding discussion on how the research outcomes and participant experiences can be employed to enhance the impact of conferences.

References

Campbell, F; Popovic, C (2010) *Why are we here? What do participants most value in educational development conferences?*

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Gosling, D (2001): *Educational development units in the UK - what are they doing five years on?* International Journal for Academic Development, 6:1

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Winter, C. (1994). *Planning a successful conference*. Survival Skills for Scholars, 13. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications