

Title: 'A stranger in a strange land'? Enabling better cultural understanding through cross-university internal secondments

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Abstract:

This session will focus primarily on the *role of academic development* theme through the sharing of new research into internal secondment of staff from different parts of a university to an academic development or similar unit and the impact of such secondments on the individual involved, the unit and the wider university.

SEDA Values

Indicate which SEDA Values may be relevant to your proposal:

An understanding of how people learn		Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice	
Working and developing learning communities	X	Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity	
Continuing reflection on professional practice	X	Developing people and processes	X

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will have had an opportunity to:

- gain an overview of findings from new research into secondment practice in academic development units
- learn about a secondment experience from the perspective of a secondee
- engage with the outcomes of our research and learning from practice in considering the implications and potential benefits for their own context

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Geopolitical metaphors are proving invaluable in enabling us to talk about the relationships between university academic departments and academic development units. Academic developers have been viewed as colonizers (McWilliam, 2002) migrants (Manathunga, 2007 Green and Little, 2011) and travellers negotiating different institutional terrains (Land, 2001).

However, the direction of travel under discussion is usually one way, with little attention paid to what happens when colleagues from different parts of the university cross the border in to academic development and become, in the words of Holmes (2012) 'a stranger in a strange land'.

What values do these 'strangers' bring with them? What souvenirs do they carry home? And what footprints do they leave behind?

Despite a commonly-held view that benefits ensue, there is limited research into this practice. We were keen to investigate assumed benefits including personal-, capacity-, community- and relationship building, encouragement of a mutual understanding by providing academic development practitioners and colleagues in academic schools with insights into each other's working experiences (Hill 2009) and the nature of the network which secondees, returning to their disciplines, may provide through which academic development work can be progressed.

With funding from a SEDA small research and development grant we surveyed universities throughout Scotland and, in two institutions, conducted in-depth interviews with four secondees, their managers and senior managers. In association with media undergraduates, secondees created their own digital story of their experience featuring relevant artifacts, reflections and contexts. We also looked at the definition and scope of projects, the respective benefits of part and full time secondments, co-location and the nature of support and integration within each unit.

In this session we will share the results of our investigation and will also present a secondee's digital story. Participants will have the opportunity to share relevant experiences and views and to explore the benefits of taking forward this practice in their own institutions.

Session Activities

<i>Surveying our explorations:</i> Interactive activity identifying relevant experience and initial views of participants	10 mins
<i>Foray into the little known:</i> Sharing findings of an investigation into secondments to academic development units	10 mins
<i>One traveller's tale:</i> Presenting a secondee's digital story	5 mins
<i>Cross border explorations ahead:</i> Group discussion of the implications of the research and its theoretical underpinning for our institutions	15 mins
<i>Travelling hopefully:</i> Summary and close	5 mins

References

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