

Title: **‘Feasible Utopias’: one scholarly approach to developing Academic Strategy**

Presenter: **Claire Taylor and Jane Chambers**
St Mary’s University

Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Appreciate the key tenets of Barnett’s book ‘Imagining the University’ and its potential for providing a scholarly basis for developing academic strategy
- Identify and reflect upon the perceived and actual tensions and possibilities, enablers and inhibitors for imagining ‘feasible utopias’ in respect of academic strategy within their institution
- Take back to their institution a range of practical approaches for developing academic strategy in the light of Barnett’s work and drawing on work related to positive academic leadership (Buller, 2013), appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al, 2008) and ‘world café’ engagement techniques

Session Outline

Engagement with scholarship encourages educational developers to approach their practice in an informed, critical and analytical way. However, we rarely consider a scholarly approach to developing strategy, defaulting instead to the approaches, proformas and templates of an often overly-managerial domain. This session gives delegates space to reconsider approaches to strategic planning, using the work of Ron Barnett - and specifically ‘Imagining the University’ (2013) - as a framework for re-envisioning the strategic imperative. It presents something of a paradigm shift in strategic academic planning from that of orthodox prescription to that of imaginative and profound scholarly construction.

Key issues to be addressed are:

- The prescriptive and often improvised manner to strategic academic planning within universities
- The suggestion that approaches such as Barnett’s have the potential to develop a more engaging, meaningful and sustainable strategic planning process
- The approach of one University (case study) in using Barnett’s work as an underpinning scholarly approach to developing academic strategy
- Identifying and reflecting upon the tensions, possibilities, enablers and inhibitors for imagining ‘feasible utopias’ in respect of academic strategy within their institution
- Practical approaches to engaging both academic and professional support staff in imagining a utopian yet feasible academic strategy.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

10 minutes: Presentation part 1 - introduction to Barnett's 'Imaging the University'; the case study context

10 minutes: tensions and possibilities, enablers and inhibitors: practical exercise and discussion

10 minutes: Presentation part 2 – exemplification of how one university engaged staff in imagining 'feasible utopias'

10 minutes: creating the conditions for imagining the University in your setting: discussion and feedback

5 minutes: summary

References

Barnett, R. (2013) *Imagining the University*. London. Routledge.

Barnett, R. (2014) *Conditions of Flexibility: Securing a more responsive higher education system*. York. HEA. <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/flexible-pedagogies-preparing-future>.

Buller, J.L (2013) *Positive Academic Leadership*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D., Stavros, J. M. (2008) *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*. Ohio: Crown Custom Publishing.

Taylor, C. (2013) The value of appreciative inquiry as an educational development tool. *Educational Developments*, Vol 14 No 3.

<http://www.theworldcafe.com/>