



Empowering Student Learners by Resolving Assessment Issues in HE: Learning from Innovation in Programme-Focussed Assessment

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From: <http://www.assessment.uconn.edu/>



Programme Assessment Strategies (PASS)

- NTFS group project over 3 years:
 - One year of development and investigation and two years of implementation.
- Consortium led by Bradford includes 2 CETLs – ASKe & AfL





This workshop aims ...

To introduce key concepts of and current approaches to programme-focussed assessment (PFA) and invite you to consider these ideas in your own context.



Workshop format

- Introductions.
- Issues in assessment and the PFA approach.
- Case studies and discussion.
- Review and wind-up.



Why bother? Problems/issues in current assessment practice

1. Failure to ensure the assessment of the espoused programme outcomes.
2. Atomisation of assessment: focused, at the micro-level, on what is easy to assess; failure to integrate and assess complex, higher-order learning; the sum of parts not making the intended whole.
3. Students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme.



Why bother? Problems/issues in current assessment practice #2

4. Modules are too short to focus and provide feedback on slowly learnt literacies and/or complex learning.
5. Students and staff adopting a 'tick-box' mentality, focused on marks, engendering a surface approach to learning which can 'encourage' plagiarism and 'game-playing'.



Why bother? Problems/issues in current assessment practice #3

6. Tendency to assume that 'one size fits all' when it comes to module assessment (with implications regarding cultural differences and students with disabilities).
7. Overuse of (institutional) rules focused on standardisation that impede innovative development of progressive and integrative assessment.



Why bother? Problems/issues in current assessment practice #4

8. Too much summative assessment, leading to overworked staff, not enough formative assessment and inability to 'see the wood for the trees' in the accumulated results.



Any other key issues for you?

- In pairs/threes (5 mins) :
 - Do you have additional issues with your assessment practices?
 - Which, if any, of these issues resonate most with you?



Recap – major problems/issues in assessment practice

1. Not assessing programme outcomes.
2. Atomisation of assessment
3. Students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme.
4. Modules too short for complex learning.
5. Surface learning and ‘tick-box mentality.
6. Inappropriate ‘one-size-fits-all’.
7. Over-standardisation in regulations.
8. Too much summative – not enough formative.



What do we mean by PFA? #1

“The first and most critical point is that the assessment is **specifically designed to address major programme outcomes** rather than very specific or isolated components of the course. It follows then that such assessment **is integrative in nature**, trying to bring together understanding and skills in ways which represent key programme aims. As a result, the assessment is likely to be more authentic and meaningful to students, staff and external stakeholders.”

From the PASS Position Paper –
<http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/position-paper.pdf>



What do we mean by PFA? #2

Varieties of PFA

Extent to which assessment covers all the specified programme outcomes

High



Low

Typical module assessment



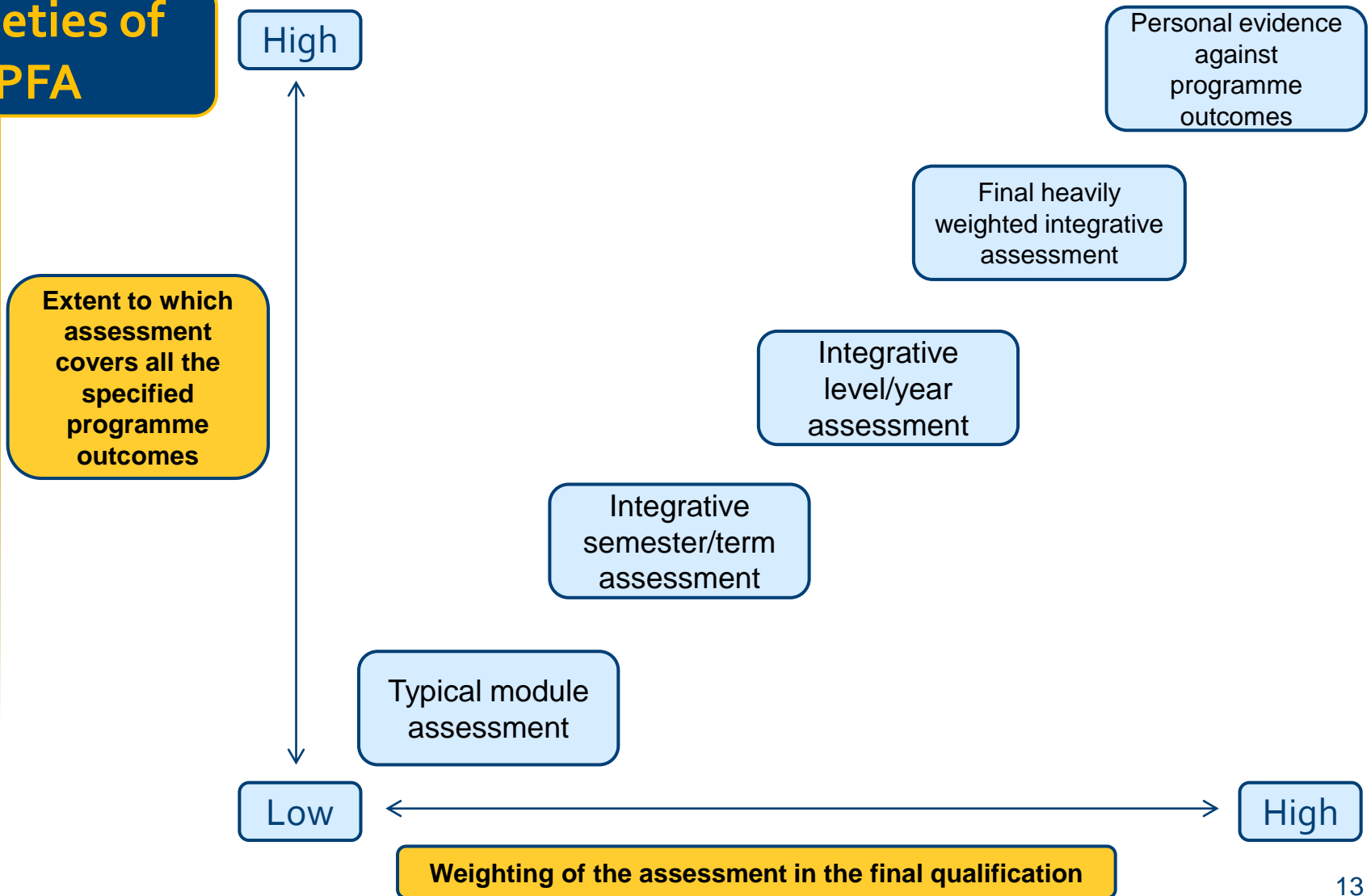
High

Weighting of the assessment in the final qualification



What do we mean by PFA? #3

Varieties of PFA





What do we mean by PFA? #4

Examples of PFA

Extent to which assessment covers all the specified programme outcomes

High

Low

@ anywhere ?

Personal evidence against programme outcomes

Option as 'Key Honours Assessment': Music degree @ Liverpool Hope

Final heavily weighted integrative assessment

Integrative level/year assessment

Synoptic exam at each u/g level Biomed Sci @ Brunel

Integrative semester/term assessment

Assessment blocks in Yrs 1 & 2 Maths @ Brunel

Typical module assessment

@ most places

High

Weighting of the assessment in the final qualification

Note: Other examples are available on the PASS web site



PFA: potential benefits

- Integrated learning and assessment at the meta-level, ensuring assessment of programme outcomes.
- Students taking a deep approach to their learning.
- Increased self and peer-assessment, developing assessment literacy.
- Greater responsibility of the student for their learning and assessment, developing self-regulated learners.



PFA: potential benefits #2

- Reduced summative assessment workload for staff (especially connected with QA).
- Possibly smaller number of 'specialist' assessors leading to greater reliability.
- Possible greater opportunity to allow for 'slow-learning'.
- Possible link to, and enhancement of, PDP, leading to greater preparedness for CPD processes after graduation.



PFA: potential issues

For students:

- Student (lack of) motivation to undertake solely formative work leading to loss of the potential benefits of coursework, and possible reduction in student engagement and lack of feedback on progress.



PFA: potential issues #2

For staff:

- Persuading, and perhaps finding resources for, module/unit leaders to work together to take a programme view. Students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme.



PFA: potential issues #3

For the **programme** and **institution**:

- Lack of a core framework of modules within some programmes to provide a common student learning experience on which to base integrative programme-focussed assessment.



Moving to PFA: Key issues to resolve

- How to assess integrated learning from across units/modules.
- How to develop the appropriate credit structures linked to units/modules and assessment regulations.
- How to manage the academic year.
- How to deal with 'high-risk' assessment.



Case Study I:

Coventry Business Management

- Each year will have a unifying theme, focussing on a different sector exemplified by a local employer with a global reach or brand – 1st Year Cadburys/Kraft, 2nd Year Jaguar, 3rd Year Barclays.
- Second semester of each year, 50% assessment will be through a large integrative task, which will be designed to assess learning from all three modules.
- 50% of each module will be independently assessed, but other 50% will come from the assessment of the integrated task against different criteria appropriate to each module's different learning outcomes.



Possible discussion questions

- What are the benefits of this approach?
- What are the potential issues?
- Would it work in your context?
- Is it worth developing or piloting?



Case Study 2:

New regulations at Brunel

- Allows conventional modules (**modular blocks**) = study and assessment credit coterminous.
- Allows separate **assessment blocks** and **study blocks**. Blocks can be 5 - 40 credits.
- **Study blocks** = purely formative, no summative assess.
- **Assessment blocks** summatively assess learning from more than one study block.
- Each level = 120 study credits + 120 assess credits.
- **Study credits** = expected student study time.
- **Assessment credits** (no time) but reflect complexity and importance.

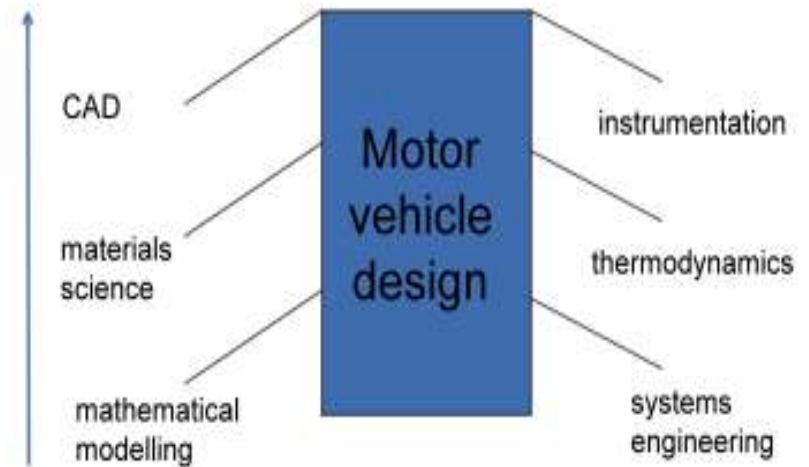


Possible discussion questions

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Other possible solutions

- Accumulative projects.
- Integrated assessment period/s (eg Maastricht).
- Capstone module/s, eg fashion show.
- Portfolio/E-portfolio (? Linked with PDP).

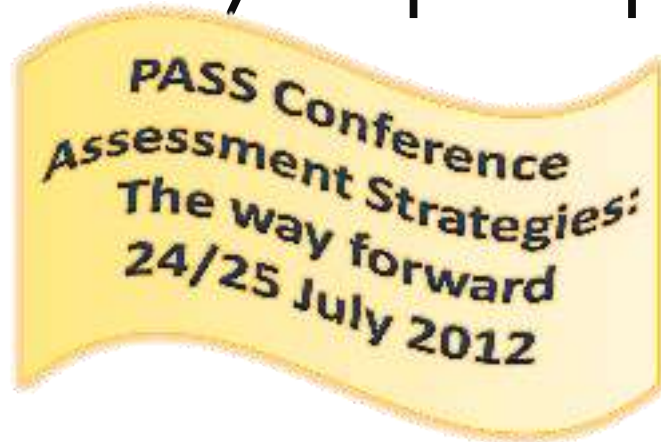


Buttress Model



And finally ...

- These and other case studies and examples are available on the PASS website - www.pass.brad.ac.uk
- Any final comments/questions?
- Thank you for your participation.





Acknowledgements

- This workshop presentation was developed by Chris Rust, Oxford Brookes University, for the PASS project with input from Peter Hartley and Ruth Whitfield, University of Bradford.
- To contact the PASS project please email: pass@bradford.ac.uk