

Title: **Whatever happened to Programme-Focused Assessment?**

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Identify the key advantages and possible limitations of Programme-Focused Assessment (PFA).
- Identify main issues in the implementation of PFA and ways of overcoming potential barriers.
- Apply principles of PFA to their own context

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

- What are the key concepts and practical advantages of Programme-Focused Assessment (PFA)
- How has PFA been implemented and developed, and what has been the impact of these implementations?
- What can we learn from this experience to inform and improve current assessment practice in HE and FE?

PASS - the NTFS group project focused on Programme-Focused Assessment (PFA) – aimed to investigate how/whether PFA could improve both the staff and student experience of assessment in higher education, starting from a review of current assessment issues (see 'Resources' on the PASS website).

PASS provided definitions and principles of PFA and case studies which illustrated different approaches in practice and discussed their impact. One major conclusion of the project was that PFA could offer significant advantages to both staff and students in terms of improving the assessment experience and the learning that can arise from it. However, the project also noted significant barriers to the implementation of PFA. While there seemed to be a lot of support for the underpinning ideas, good examples of their application were relatively thin on the ground. There were some striking examples of innovation, such as the introduction of study and assessment blocks to replace conventional modular structures at Brunel, but even these did not necessarily permeate through the whole institution.

This session will revisit the principles and case studies of PFA from PASS and review more recent developments in assessment practices to analyse how far these ideas and examples

have continuing relevance (Carless, 2015) and scope for future development. Our own post-project experience suggests that fundamental ideas behind PFA have become more important – e.g. focusing on programme outcomes (Price et al, 2012) - while some barriers to implementation have increased, e.g. the ‘disappearance’ of course teams and the restrictions of modular systems.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

0-15 minutes

Introductory presentation which will:

- Review the main outcomes of the PASS project in terms of principles of PFA and examples of its implementation
- Analyse how far these ideas and principles have been taken up and/or further developed in the years since the project

15-30 minutes

Small group discussion around the following questions. The presenters will circulate round the groups to offer clarifications and further comments.

- Are the ideas and principles of PFA still important and relevant?
- Why has PFA not become a more prominent feature across FE and HE?
- What are the barriers to PFA in your context?
- What are the most important principles from PFA which could help our assessment practices?

30-45 minutes

Plenary discussion to review:

- What is the continuing relevance of PFA?
- How can we best adapt the ideas and principles of PFA in the current FE and HE context?

References

Carless D. (2015) *Excellence in University Assessment: Learning from Award-winning Practice*. London: Routledge.

PASS project website: <http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk>

Price M., Rust C., O'Donovan B., Handley K., with Bryant R. (2012) *Assessment Literacy, the Foundation for Improving Student Learning*. Oxford: OCLSD.