

Learning and Teaching Conference 2012

Abstract 1B

Programme Assessment Strategies for Empowering Student Learners in HE

Presenters: Ruth Whitfield, Project Manager, PASS Project, University of Bradford and Peter Hartley, Project Director, PASS Project, University of Bradford

The PASS (Programme Assessment Strategies) project was set up to directly confront issues which concern every course/programme leader in HE: how to design and deliver an effective, efficient and sustainable assessment strategy which ensures that the main course/programme outcomes are satisfied. Programme-Focused Assessment (PFA) provides a framework for such effective strategies.

The emphasis in PFA is on integrative assessment which relates very directly to the overall programme aims and outcomes. This can deal with assessment issues at two rather different levels: dealing with specific issues in assessment as currently practised across HE, and supporting course/programme leaders with responsibility for the overall assessment strategy.

The advantages of and main barriers to PFA will be illustrated by major case studies which PASS has investigated. These include a range of different approaches and show how PFA can address major criticisms of current HE practice. For example, Margaret Price et al (2011) bemoans the lack of "pedagogic, and particularly assessment, literacy" possessed by both academic staff and students. Comparing approaches to assessment, they suggest "an incremental approach focused at module/unit level provides an assessment experience that appears ready disaggregated to students, whereas a program/course focus enables an overview of assessment tasks and progression." That overview, coupled with the level of student understanding, is a key component of effective PFA.

References

Price, M., Carroll, J., O'Donovan, B. and Rust, C. (2011) 'If I was going there I wouldn't start from here: a critical commentary on current assessment practices', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36 (4), 479-492.

Case studies from the PASS project can be found at <http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/>

Outcomes

- Identify the main characteristics and potential value of Programme Focused Assessment (PFA).
- Compare a range of approaches to PFA and identify their typical impact on student engagement.
- Identify the main enablers and barriers which influence the development and implementation of PFA.
- Identify potential applications of PFA in their own context and institution.