



Programme Assessment Strategies
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Leadership & Management in the Air Travel Industry

FDA Case Study – Evaluation and Impact

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Leadership & management in the Air Travel Industry FDA Case Study – Evaluation and Impact

1 Summary

Variety of PFA	Synoptic, integrated approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are used across the programme, requiring a cross-functional approach to business environment issues.
Course	Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry Foundation Degree (LMATI FDA)
Faculty and institution	Awarded by the University of Exeter, delivered by the academic partner, Exeter College with support from partner employer, Flybe Group PLC.
Type/duration	Two years, full-time
Timing	Introduced in 2009 (from inception)

1.1 Overview

This paper offers an evidence-based evaluation of a new programme - the Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry Foundation Degree (LMATI FDA), which was designed to deliver impact for stakeholders by ensuring that all major elements (mode of delivery, teaching, learning and assessment activities) serve the programme level aims. Programme focused (PF) approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have been adopted since inception and the successful achievement of programme level outcomes can logically be linked to these innovations. This paper builds on a detailed case study of the structure of the LMATI FDA and its assessment practices, undertaken on behalf of the PASS Project in 2011 (Smith, 2012). These documents are intended to support the development and implementation of effective alternatives to module-focused assessment, through the provision of evidence-based guidance and exemplars.

1.2 Main Programme Objectives

- To deliver significant impact for both the employee (learner) and the employer (partner organisation)
- To link learning directly to workplace experience and integrate academic discipline and professional practice

- To adopt an approach to leadership and management education, which moves away from the atomisation of the subject into discrete business functions

1.3 Programme Focused (PF) Approaches to Assessment

- Use of synoptic, problem-based assessment and extended yearlong modules
- Students are required to make ongoing links between taught material and modules (i.e. a cross-functional, business-wide approach) for all formative and summative assignments
- Ongoing, formative feedback and continuous opportunities for critical reflection and ‘meta-learning’ skill development

1.4 Key Assessment Framework / Regulations

- Thematic (rather than business function or subject) modules
- Modules of assessment (not teaching and assessment) modules
- Course is implemented within standard University regulations
- Creation of e-submissions system and attention to administrative structure
- Programme Director role is key to effective delivery

1.5 Main Impact On Staff

- More formative feedback supplied to students
- Regular liaison with all stakeholders (including partner employer)
- Attention to administrative structure throughout

1.6 Main Impact On Students

- Initial anxieties demonstrated need for clear communication and induction
- Students adopting ‘deep learning’ approaches
- Perception of positive impact on professional practice and personal development

1.7 Main Impact on other stakeholders

- Employer (Flybe Group PLC) reports improved performance from students
- Initial indications that final assessment (problem-based inquiry into workplace issue) will deliver added value for organisation
- Positive perception of programme among wider workforce

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Further information	Initial LMATI FDA Case Study: http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/case-studies/4-exeter-flybe.pdf Course details on partner college site: http://www.exe-coll.ac.uk/Course.aspx?id=BIT-4ab58ee0-05eb-49e0-90ca-ac33ba315cc2

2 Introduction

This paper forms part of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) Programme Assessment Strategies (PASS) project. The PASS project has adopted the term ‘programme-focused assessment’ to highlight an approach to assessment, which focuses on programme outcomes. This approach offers alternatives to assessment linked to module learning outcomes, which evidence shows is not wholly effective in developing student capabilities (Rust, 2007).

Programme-focused assessment concentrates on course-level outcomes, rather than atomising individual assessment components; hence it is integrative in nature, trying to bring together understandings of subject and skills in ways, which represent key programme aims (PASS, 2012, p.3). However, integrative assessment alone will not deliver programme-level outcomes. In order to deliver meaningful outcomes for students, staff and external stakeholders, effective assessment strategies rely on aligned teaching and learning structures (PASS, 2012, p.3). Building on this argument, the term ‘Programme Focused’ (PF) is adopted by the author, to enable discussion not only of assessment strategies but also aligned approaches to learning and teaching, which focus on the achievement of programme-level outcomes.

Adopting PF approaches to assessment can be challenging in situations where a programme has developed over time and numerous stakeholders have an investment in the maintenance of individual module approaches and elements. As Price et al. comment, achieving a programme focus to assessment “...may challenge some staffs’ established working patterns” (2011, p.490). Nonetheless, the development of effective programmes, which deliver meaningful outcomes for students, staff and external stakeholders, is of paramount importance in the ever changing, commercially competitive, post-Browne (2010) landscape.

This paper offers an evidence-based evaluation of the development and delivery of a new programme - the Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry Foundation Degree (LMATI FDA), which was designed to deliver impact for stakeholders by ensuring that all major elements (mode of delivery, teaching, learning and assessment activities) serve the programme level aims. PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have been adopted since inception and the successful achievement of programme level outcomes can logically be linked to these innovations. This evaluation builds on a detailed case study of the structure of the LMATI FDA and its assessment practices, undertaken on behalf of the PASS Project in 2011 (Smith, 2012) and is intended to support the development and implementation of effective alternatives to module-focused assessment, through the provision of evidence-based guidance and exemplars.

2.1 Subject Context

Like so much within the field of leadership studies, the issue of leadership development remains highly contentious (Bolden, 2005). As Adair observes:

“The object of thinking is truth. But to think out the truth about leadership or leadership development from – as we say – first principles, would take forever.” (2009 p.61)

Some reports conclude there are clear links between high quality leadership and management and sustainable economic growth and productivity (CEML, 2002). In turn, they predicate the need for, and characteristics of, management (and leadership) education on this solid foundation. In this context, leadership is characterised as ‘excellent management’ (Barker, 1997) and presupposes that the skills and abilities of practitioners can be developed through leadership and management professional training and/or development. Others view leadership and management education as a cognitive exploration of social patterns and structures, which produces an integration of conceptual knowledge, ideals, insight, experiences, and sources of behaviour (Barker, 1997). This ‘academic’ or research-led view can appear at odds with the ‘practitioner’ approach.

However, even if we accept the assumption that leadership and management education is a form of professional training, it must be aligned with the organisational culture, context and objectives (amongst other factors) in order to be impactful and effective. Raelin (2004, p.131) states:

“Most leadership training that is being conducted in corporate off-sites is ill-advised [...] because the intent of most of this training is to put leadership into people such that they can transform themselves and their organisations upon their return.”

Against this backdrop of academic contestation, a combination of pragmatic drivers – sector/employer demand, student demand, funding opportunities and organisational development – continue generate new course design and curricula.

2.2 National Context

Foundation degrees are located at Level 5 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (QAA, 2008) but they are distinct from other higher education programmes because of their requirement for work-based (or, in some cases, work-related) learning to be incorporated into the programme. The Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (FDBQ) (QAA, 2004) emphasises the intention that Foundation degrees should link academic and work-based learning. The FDQB, (QAA, 2004, p.4) states:

“Foundation degrees integrate academic and work-based learning through close collaboration between employers and programme providers. They... are intended to equip learners with the skills and knowledge relevant to their employment, so satisfying the needs of employees and employers.”

Further education (FE) colleges across the UK, under the auspices of higher education (HE) institutions, now deliver a plethora of Foundation Degree programmes. In the South West region, a smaller number of Foundation Degree programmes, are based on three-way partnerships between a HE institution, a FE college and an employer.

2.3 Stakeholder drivers for PF Approaches

A number of stakeholders have been involved in the design of the LMATI FDA since its inception in 2007. This case study focuses on the period post-programme approval in 2009 and the subsequent delivery of the first two-year programme as a three-way partnership between a HE institution (the University of Exeter), an FE college (Exeter College) and an employer (Flybe Group PLC). The University of Exeter is the awarding institute and Exeter College is the academic partner responsible

for staffing, curriculum and delivery. The employer, Flybe, is involved in the programme delivery and assessment.

The LMATI FDA places the skill set of an effective leader and manager at the heart of the programme design and delivery. The curriculum design is premised on the assumptions that authentic pedagogy focuses on the identification, analysis and resolution of immediate problems in the learners' world (Freire, 1970) and that 'distance learning' enables proximity to the site where learning is applied (Ladkin et al., 2009). These principles fit with the requirements laid down by the host employer and the curriculum development team's (see Appendix 1) goal of synthesis of individual and organisational development. In order to achieve the programme level aims, an innovative learning and assessment structure was developed, that would require working managers to adopt a cross-functional, business-wide approach.

2.4 Overview of the LMATI FDA Curriculum

The LMATI FDA is a full-time programme taken over two years by employed managers. This is possible because of the use of a weekly planning and reflection system, which aims to turn the workplace and the working week into integral sources of learning.

Philosophically, there is recognition from all stakeholders, "...that the act of learning supersedes seat time" (Bradley, Seidman & Painchaud, 2011, p.19). Work-based learning activities are supported by university and college teaching, which includes taught 'Master Classes' (approximately 6 weeks apart over two year programme), peer-led enquiry groups, online and face-to-face tutor support, workplace mentoring and self-directed study.

Although the programme is divided into thematic 'modules', these are assessment, rather than teaching and assessment modules. The LMATI FDA uses synoptic assessment and a cross-functional approach to business environment issues to avoid atomisation. Students are expected to apply the principles of resource planning, business analysis, service excellence and leading change across the Master Class topics (see: <http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/case-studies/4-exeter-flybe.pdf> for a detailed description of the curriculum matrix). These PF approaches aim to foster strategic business-wide thinking, rather than a narrow 'subject for assessment' focus.

In Year 1 the students undertake four modules:

- Strategic Leadership & Managerial Effectiveness 1 (60 credits)
- Resource Planning in the Air Travel Industry (20 credits)
- Business Analysis in the Air Travel Industry (20 credits)
- Designing Service Excellence (20 credits)

In Year 2 the students undertake a further three modules:

- Strategic Leadership & Managerial Effectiveness 2 (60 credits)
- Leading Change within the Air Travel Industry (20 credits)
- Business Improvement Project (40 credits)

3 Aims of the Paper

- To describe the impact of the curriculum and assessment strategy adopted by the LMATI FDA, with particular reference to PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment from key stakeholder perspectives:
 - Individual Learners
 - Partner Employer – Senior Management Perspective
 - Programme Team
- To identify general implications of PF approaches for work-based programmes
- To consider the extent to which PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment underpin the delivery of simultaneous impact for learners and partner organisations.

4 The Field-Work

This paper is based on qualitative research capturing the impact of the LMATI FDA from key stakeholder perspectives:

- Individual Learners
- Partner Employer – Senior Management Perspective
- Programme Team

The evaluation of the impact of PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment is challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, it demands clarity about the holistic educational purpose of the programme. This can be problematic, as in the case of the LMATI FDA, which has multiple stakeholders each with a ‘psychological contract,’ (Rousseau, 1996) which may differ significantly from the formal espousal of the course outcomes. Equally, just as we should seek to avoid reductionism when *designing* assessment strategies, so we cannot *evaluate* assessment strategies in isolation from the myriad of correlating teaching and learning approaches. One example of the interdependence of PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment is problem-based learning (PBL). PBL tends to lead to more integration as it “...bridges disciplines and blurs the boundaries between them” (White, 2002, p.120). However, to be successful, problem-based assessment strategies need to emerge from a wider curriculum design that supports learners to construct coherence across disciplines and develop an understanding of the drivers for this approach. Finally, when evaluating any complex process it is difficult to attribute outcomes to a single cause. The summative ‘Business Improvement Project’ is a PF approach to assessment, which appears to have yielded real results for both the learners and the organisation (several projects have subsequently been implemented by the partner employer, leading to significant cost reduction and revenue increase). However, these positive outcomes are the result of a confluence of events, which cannot realistically be attributed solely to the assessment ethos, or indeed the programme (Early, Carden & Smutylo, 2001, p.xi).

For these reasons, this study adopts the term ‘outcome mapping’ as proposed by Early, Carden and Smutylo (2001). Outcome mapping shifts evaluative focus away from assessing ‘products,’ instead focusing on changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities in the people, groups, and organizations (Early, Carden & Smutylo, 2001, p.1). This evaluation focuses on changes in behaviour,

relationships, actions, and activities of the employees and employer directly involved with the programme, generating hypotheses about outcomes that can be logically linked to PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

4.1 The Methodology

This appraisal of the personal and organisational impact of the LMATI FDA was undertaken via a series of qualitative research interviews, conducted by the Programme Director (bias and ethical implications of this approach are considered in the next section). Two main stakeholder groups were approached to participate in the research:

1. The 13 learners (working managers employed by Flybe Group PLC) who graduated as alumni of the LMATI FDA in 2011.
2. Five Senior Managers and Directors employed by Flybe Group PLC, who were directly involved in supporting those enrolled on the LMATI FDA between 2009 and 2011.

Learner participants were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone, which lasted approximately 30 minutes. Senior Management were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone, which lasted approximately 20 minutes. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with 10 student alumni between 26th March and the 6th of April. A further 5 interviews were conducted with 5 Senior Managers between the 23rd and 27th of April.

All interviews were based on a common set of topics related to the course (such as personal and professional development, course design and impact, individual and organisational change). Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and qualitatively analysed to establish common themes across participants.

4.2 The Role of the Interviewer

All interviews were carried out by the author, who knows the participants in her capacity as Programme Director of the LMATI FDA. Some learners have also expressed a desire to progress onto a 'top up' degree year, which may be delivered by the author. As a result, the interviewer was conscious of her ethical responsibilities when carrying out this educational research. The right to decline to participate without adverse consequences was emphasised, firstly, in the information sheets distributed to all alumni and again, at the outset of the interviews. During interviews learners were explicitly encouraged to share the spectrum of their experience, from positive to neutral or negative, in their own words. The potentially significant impact of the role of the researcher as the filter through which data are collected, organised and interpreted (Lichtman, 2010, p.116) is acknowledged and all interviews were recorded and will be retained for validity and reliability checks.

The interviews were conducted approximately seven months after all thirteen students successfully graduated from the LMATI FDA, a factor likely to have significantly influenced the feedback received from learner-participants. The Programme Director is acutely aware that the journey towards the largely positive, retrospective, conclusions captured by this evaluation was characterised by a range of learner emotions and experiences. Much of the shock, confusion, anxiety and frustration the learner-participants experienced during the programme has subsequently been effaced by the sense of achievement and success following graduation. However, the 'gap' between completion and evaluation affords the opportunity to try to assess 'behaviour' and 'results' rather than just 'reaction' (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

This research does not strive for the “fiction of objectivity” (Breuer et. al., 2002, cited in Lichtman, 2010, p.116). Instead, it focuses upon the learner-participants’ perceptions of changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities. This data is supported by a series of interviews with senior managers within the partner organisation and quantitative programme data.

5 Findings

5.1 Learner Experience and Programme Impact

All 10 learner-participants are ‘mature’ students, defined by the Higher Education Statistics Authority as, “...those who are aged 21 or over, at 30 September of the academic year in which they are recorded as entering the institution” (HESA, 2012). Many students were returning to formal education after a significant break of years, or in some cases, decades.

5.1.1 PF Approaches and ‘Learning Shock’

During interview many learner-participants described the ‘shock’ of returning to formal learning whilst continuing in paid employment:

“Learning shock refers to experiences of acute frustration, confusion and anxiety experienced by some students. These students find themselves exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods, bombarded by unexpected and disorienting cues and subject to ambiguous and conflicting expectations” (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2004, p.2)

The comments of one learner-participant (02) highlight the barriers of language and terminology encountered by those re-entering formal education at this level:

“...We were sat there and they said this is the brief, this is what you’ve got to do and this is your question and you now need to write something back on that question. I honestly looked at it and thought I can’t even see a question! It was a statement. It was really... I was so far ‘out of academia’ if you like, that I didn’t understand how to produce something to that level. So, I actually pushed it away and thought, no, this isn’t for me...”

In the case of the LMATI FDA the initial ‘learning shock’ was exacerbated by a fragmented outset (due to staffing issues) and the innovative PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. The pilot cohort enrolled in September 2009 but shortly afterwards the internal member of staff, appointed by the college to manage the programme, departed. This may, in part, be attributed to the administrative and teaching challenges presented by PF approaches to assessment. It could be argued that this member of staff, who was asked to deliver a programme with “...unfamiliar learning and teaching methods” (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2004, p.2), which demanded new vocabularies, teaching approaches and infrastructure, also experienced a form of ‘learning shock.’ During interview, seven months after graduation, every student commented on the impact of the initial staffing and course administration issues.

However, even after the appointment of a new Programme Director, the creation of administrative structure and the introduction of course management, a number of learners continued to find the programme challenging:

“It’s very difficult and extremely stressful combining roles and studying. Some stress was self-imposed, brought on by wanting to do the best for myself and for you in the course but also by doing that along with everything else that was going on at the time... the volume of work” (Participant 09)

As professionals with considerable experience in their fields, such as engineering, aviation, operations and management, learners suddenly found themselves novices in the classroom, yet having to maintain high standards in demanding work roles. These challenges were combined with entirely unfamiliar approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

“Many adult students return to an environment that they believe they know from earlier experiences...” (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2004, p.5)

One of the commonly expressed concerns related to the adoption of PF approaches, is the challenge of explaining the complexities of an unfamiliar system to new students and staff (Rodway-Dyer, 2010, p.12). In the case of the LMATI FDA, the move away from modules of teaching and assessment, or as one learner-participant (01) described it the “taught then tested” approach, created confusion.

“I found that quite confusing [the programme structure]. It was really different to any learning that we’d done before. I think you actually said during one of the master classes that it is actually different than being taught the subject then being tested on it later, it was... which is how most of us had learnt previously.” (Participant 01)

“It sometimes led to some confusion, because of the mismatch in the subject you’re talking about and the subject you’re writing about...” (Participant 04)

Interestingly, one of the learners who struggled most with the PF teaching and assessment structure had previously completed a degree:

“I’ve got to say I didn’t really understand the structure, how it was trying to teach us, so I didn’t really have any impressions because I didn’t really understand it, I was a bit baffled... I didn’t understand it at all until probably the end of the first year. When we had a long chat about it and it finally clicked.” (Participant 05)

In contrast, another learner-participant who had no recent experience of formal education and described his school experience as, “...all A’s – absent!” commented that the unusual course structure had little impact, “...because it was all so new and I wasn’t used to the level of academia, I don’t think I found it as hard as some others” (Participant 02).

Seven months after graduation, the emotional elements of ‘learning shock’ appear to have faded and several participants share similar, positive views of the impact of the assessment structure:

“Initially it was confusing but I think it was valuable as we got further into the course, I think that [the assessment structure] was more valuable in making the connections between various aspects of the course” (Participant 02)

“It [the assessment structure] didn’t particularly bother me in the end any way because it gave you a bit more of a rounded thing because you were doing a lot of soft study and stuff at home to get a more rounded picture for your assignment” (Participant 03)

The interviews conducted with this small group of learner-participants suggests that PF approaches to assessment have the potential to exacerbate ‘learning shock’ (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2004) if they are not immediately accompanied by supportive teaching and learning structures. However, considered in conjunction with subsequent responses to questions about personal and professional impact, it would seem that the majority of learners ultimately recognise the validity of approaches, which offer “...the most profound types of learning, those that involve a radical reconstruction of identity, outlook on life and values”(Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2004, p.4).

5.1.2 Personal and Professional Impact

All 10 learner-participants identified significant, positive, changes in personal and professional behaviour, relationships, actions and activities, which were attributed to participation in the LMATI FDA. However, as one learner-participant (02) commented, “...if it hadn’t helped me I wouldn’t be having this conversation with you now...” and we must countenance the possibility that the three members of the programme who did not respond to the call for participants were of this view. Nonetheless, the overwhelming indication from this small ‘sample’ is that the programme delivered significant personal and professional impacts in these areas:

Professional Confidence

Habit of Learning

Commercial Knowledge

Interpersonal Skills

Reflective Professional Practice

Solution Focused Approaches

For detailed accounts of the learner-participant comments see Appendix 2.

5.2 Partner Employer – Senior Management Perspective

Five interviews were conducted with five Senior Managers and Directors between the 23rd and 27th of April. The managers interviewed were directly involved in supporting those enrolled on the LMATI FDA between 2009 and 2011. Their involvement varied from mentoring and supporting direct line reports enrolled on the programme to acting as a visiting ‘expert speaker’ during the two day Master Classes.

5.2.1 Organisational Impact:

The manager-participants identified a number of specific instances of increased personal and professional effectiveness in staff, which they attributed to participation in the LMATI FDA, including:

“...They are being driven to be much more research-orientated and reference orientated and just to be possibly a bit more balanced in their opinions...” (Manager A)

“...What it did do was give a confidence that what they had been doing in their career up to that point was actually correct but they now had a name for it or there was now a sort of an official recognition that it was the right way forward” (Manager E)

Several managers also felt that the integrated assessment structure of the programme yielded a more immediate impact:

“...What I found is that you could see they were applying stuff that they had done during the course, they were applying it to their every day work, which I thought was tremendous...” (Manager E)

“...It allows people to... not only to see the context for it but actually to develop what they are doing as they do their ‘day job’ as the course develops... you’re not waiting until the end of the two years to see the rewards you’re reaping the rewards [as the course goes on] in terms of the quality of the work those individuals can produce” (Manager B)

All the managers identified qualitative impacts but several managers acknowledged that the quantitative value of new projects and processes arising directly from the programme (such as Business Improvement Projects) would take longer to manifest.

For detailed accounts of the manager-participant interviews see Appendix 3.

5.3 PF Approaches to Assessment and Programme Impact

The LMATI FDA uses five main types of PF assessment:

1. **Professional Practice Portfolio**
2. **Reflective Assignments**
3. **Professional Reports**
4. **Written Assignments**
5. **Professional Presentations**

5.3.1 Strategic Leadership & Managerial Effectiveness (Years 1 & 2):

These two core modules within the LMATI FDA are spread over the academic year, enabling the student to build up a portfolio of evidence. At the end of each yearlong module, students submit a ‘**Professional Practice Portfolio,**’ which contains a variety of elements including:

- Self Assessment: analysis and evaluation of ongoing feedback relating to own performance, received within both work and study.
- Professional Learning Tool (PLT): this weekly managerial learning tool stimulates and captures critical thinking, problem solving and innovation. It also links learning (reading, feedback, lectures and research) to professional practice.
- Personal Development Plan: Career and learning to date, definition of own role and responsibilities, previous qualifications and plan for own learning.
- Innovation and Creativity: sketches, words and pictures that capture the application of the critical thinking process to organisational development.
- Academic Learning: engagement with study skills.

Many learners cited a shift towards a more reflective form of management as one of the key changes in their professional practice, which they attributed to the programme:

“I’m certainly much more reflective, I’m certainly a little bit slower to jump to conclusions and I think that I take better time to consider situations and the way that I’m going to deal with them.” (Participant 06)

“...The reflective process... was really key to a lot of things – I do try and make accurate records of what I discuss with my staff and I try to be as objective as I possibly can when I do that. I think in the past I have probably been a bit guilty of imposing my own viewpoints on things, where as now I try to re-read what I’ve put and try to step out of my own shoes and look at it from someone else’s point of view.” (Participant 10)

The **‘Professional Practice Portfolio,’** and in particular the PLT element of this teaching, learning and assessment tool, plays a significant role in engendering the ‘learning habit’ and also supporting learners to develop their own reflective practice. As one learner-participant highlights, the fact that this element of the programme fully integrated into the assessment was key:

“As part of the course because we were assessed, we had to do these learning logs (PLT) and I kind of got into the habit of reading stuff and trying to generate thinking and debate and actions out of it so, that became a bit of a habit and I think that has improved me professionally.” (Participant 05)

In non-PF course design, reflective writing may carry a small credit weighting and appear as an adjunct to the experience of a particular module or assignment. In the LMATI FDA, the value placed upon the formative and summative assessment of the PLT is significant and gives learners time to focus and receive feedback on slowly learnt literacies and/or complex learning. Nonetheless, at the outset of the programme there was learner resistance to this unfamiliar assessment practice, which stepped away from the content for assessment focus many had experienced in other educational settings.

The authentic assessment of critically reflective practice is also challenging for staff. It requires a willingness to engage with personal and professional problem-based issues, which may not have an easy or obvious resolution. It also demands a willingness to engage with the business world and often to understand the tension between the client and organisation, a role more akin to that of a professional coach than ‘teacher.’ Also, as Hargreaves (2004, p.200) suggests, there are varied definitions of what it means to be a ‘reflective practitioner,’ and the use of recounted narrative may restrict legitimate stories to only three types “valedictory... condemnatory... and redemptive.” In the case of the LMATI FDA, the small cohort size and regular PLT submissions made it easier for the PD to build rapport and encourage students to take risks with their reflection. For those who retained an assessment-led focus the opportunity to select the entries they wished to include in their final summative portfolio was key. This enabled some learners to tackle problem-based issues where the outcome was ‘messy’ or negative, without the fear of a ‘grade impact.’

Although initially difficult to implement, this PF strategy was one of the approaches, which a number of learner-participants felt had a significant impact on their development, both during and after the programme:

“Oddly enough the thing that it took me a little while to get going with, the learning logs, I complete weekly now...” (Participant 07)

5.3.2 Resource Planning in the Air Travel Industry (Year 1):

The overarching aim of this 20-credit module is to introduce managers within the Air Travel Industry to the concept of planning and problem solving. Using the PLT managers reflect upon the complexities of resource planning, demonstrating their ability to research, analyse and propose a range of suitable solutions. The business topics, which are covered within the taught Master Classes, form the subject matter and the Air Travel Industry the context, against which to apply the higher-level skills of resource planning. The summative assessment of this module has two parts:

- 1) The student develops, in consultation with their workplace mentor and personal tutor, their own final topic for summative assessment. A **‘professional report’** is produced using a variety of media, to a problem-based question focussed on the ability to plan resources. (2,500 words or equivalent) (80% of module assessment)
- 2) One formative assignment is selected and included with the assignment along with a brief **‘reflective assignment’** (1,000 words) on the lessons learned from this process. (20% of module assessment)

The presence of theoretical content (e.g. models and methods of resource planning) validated the module in some learners’ eyes, especially in the first year when some learners were anxious about the self-directed nature of the learning in the core module. During learner-participant interviews it became clear that this module played a significant role in developing a ‘company-wide’ focus and supporting the development of cross-departmental understanding. A non-PF approach could have reinforced ideas of the separateness of the business functions and even allowed students to disengage from, or ‘opt out’ of, modules which focused on areas they initially deemed outside their remit.

“...It was how we had to look at the whole structure of the business... the whole of the business, rather than me thinking this [department] that’s it...” (Participant 02)

This PF assessment module attempts to ensure students are synthesizing learning outcomes, adapting and transferring them effectively in unfamiliar settings whilst ‘held’ by the course structure. The intention is that the understanding of the process of learning remains after the programme ends and enables participants to analyse and research new issues when and if they arise:

“...I constantly think back to the books that we referenced and to everything on the course and think what can I pick up from that and how do I apply it in certain situations...” (Participant 04)

5.3.3 Business Analysis in the Air Travel Industry:

This module develops the analytical and reasoning skills of managers working within the Air Travel Industry. Having engaged with a range of theories and concepts students are asked to identify and analyse organisational issues and reflect upon the insights theory offers to the practical reality of managing and leading in their organisational setting. The module is assessed via the identification and detailed analysis of a contemporary Air Travel Industry issue in a **written assignment**. The

student must select and justify an analytical technique or management model against which to perform the analysis (80% of module). In addition, two formative assignments are included, which best demonstrates progress through the module and effective use of formative feedback (20% of module).

This module demands that learners apply ‘academic’ models to industry issues in order to generate evidence-based conclusions:

“You learn to write without personalising and make sure there is detail and not suppositions, being more factual.” (Participant 04)

This module also encourages learners to look, not only beyond their own department but also beyond their own organisation to consider the wider industry context. They are required to corral the information into a succinct, well-structured assignment:

“...You need to get to the nub of the question and get to the point early on [in assignments] has helped... when I’ve been writing those business papers which can only really be two sides of A4 at the most.” (Participant 07)

Enquiry-based skills were developed effectively by the PF of this assessment module, which rather than teaching a set curriculum of business tools for assessment, demanded the learners identified an issue and then researched the most appropriate analysis approach. Several managers remarked upon the change this approach engendered:

“...I have noticed a change and they do write their papers in a more analytical way, they will put forward arguments via email offering perhaps more support than they had before. So, I think I can see an improvement of the way they offer, suggestion, the written word and argument. So, yes, I have noticed a difference and it will give them more credence and more influence as a result” (Manager C)

“...They are being driven to be much more research-orientated and reference orientated...” (Manager A)

5.3.4 Business Improvement Projects:

These modules offer an integration of the learning of the whole programme into practical projects related to the Air Travel Industry, either real or prospective, that both evidence an understanding of the knowledge gained through the programme and the ability to use that knowledge in a work setting:

Year 1 - Designing Service Excellence (20 credits)

Year 2 – Business Improvement Project (40 credits)

The Business Improvement Project (BIP) at the end of the two-year programme fully utilises the inquiry skills of research, questioning, problem solving and analysis. Having consulted across the organisation and identified a new market opportunity, process improvement or service enhancement need, the manager scopes, plans and develops a significant business improvement project. The business improvement project will only move forward with the backing of senior management and therefore the persuasion and influencing skills of the manager are paramount in

securing stakeholder commitment. Higher-level skills such as resource planning and business analysis underpin the project and offer managers the opportunity to implement and reflect upon their learning.

The BIP is intended to yield development opportunities for the learner and participants all agreed that the process was valuable. However, the goal of simultaneous individual and organisational development dictates that the 'product' outcome must also be considered in this area. At the point of interview a number of learners were still waiting for their projects to come to fruition, "...I may well carry it on I hope in the next twelve months but it's not going to happen quickly" (Participant 03) but a small minority of projects appear to have already delivered financial savings / revenue:

*"We've taken on [****] – which was a negative £190,000 loss-making unit, we've actually taken that around to a profit-making business... We now make profit rather than just being a cost centre, which is really good..."* (Participant 02)

"... We did some work on how many man hours... the dash board would save and it equated to £140,000. [Potential revenue] a ballpark figure over an annual period you're probably looking at something in the region of £250 – 300,000." (Participant 08)

It is important to acknowledge that some projects may have taken place without the programme requirement for students to complete a BIP. However, a participant whose project may yield significant revenue / savings commented that structure of the programme fostered a broader, cross-company perspective:

"It would have been something I would have looked at in my own role anyway but it wouldn't necessarily have had to go out of my own department... but I think through talking to people through things like our enquiry circles and having an understanding of where they don't get information, it brought it all to mind..." (Participant 08)

A preceding Year 2 module – Leading Change within the Air Travel Industry, facilitates the BIP. This module introduces managers to the principles of leading change and managing projects, highlighting the skills needed to ensure success. In some students the combined experience of the BIP and the 'Leading Change' module has resulted in a solution-focused approach, which has continued post-completion:

"... It's got me into that sort of mindset of thinking not so much, there's something wrong somebody ought to fix it but there is something there that might be able to be changed for the better and perhaps I might be able to do something about it. So perhaps I've been given the tools now, better tools to understand how best to approach change from within the organisation definitely." (Participant 09)

The summative assessment of these elements of the programme are characterised by **professional presentations** and problem-based **written assignments**. In recognition of the view that:

"Employers are often better placed than staff from educational institutions for assessing aspects of performance in the workplace, whereas the reverse is true for academic achievements, such as writing reflectively on experience." (Woolfe & Yorke, 2010, p.14)

The summative assessed presentation panel comprises of both academic staff and senior members of the employer leadership team. A fact that was commented upon favourably by the external examiner:

“Senior members of the sponsoring organisation (Flybe) had been present at student presentations and assessments. This is a very encouraging demonstration of commitment to the course and their students.” (White, 2010, p.5)

However, this integration of professional and academic assessment also presents challenges to consistency and validity. It is not always possible to secure the time of the same members of the senior leadership team on each of the two days of assessment (due to operational / logistical issues). To ensure that the validity of the assessment is not compromised each assessor is briefed in advance. All assessors receive the same assessment sheet but employers do not have the opportunity to award grades if they will not experience all presentations. Verbal and written feedback from employer assessors is included in the internal moderation between LMATI FDA staff agreeing the grading, following each day of assessment. This PF approach increases the administrative burden. It can be time-consuming to book busy professionals and brief all assessors but the presence of a member of senior leadership elevates this from a purely ‘academic’ exercise to an integrated assessment of both learner skill, subject knowledge and the contextual value of the proposal.

5.3.5 PF Approaches and ‘Graduateness’

When asked about their primary motivations for undertaking the programme learner-participants were ostensibly driven by pragmatic drivers such as a desire for a qualification, or progression:

“I wanted to gain a degree, for my own personal satisfaction and to prove to my self that I was able to have a degree and could study to attain a degree.” (Participant 09)

“I was aware that in order to progress further I needed to do some more learning and this... came up and it was a subject matter that interested me and I thought that it would be useful for me and my career prospects moving forwards...” (Participant 07)

“...I wanted a degree... I never did any sort of degree courses in my life at school... and this is the perfect opportunity to combine work and learning and to get a degree at the end of it.” (Participant 01)

Very few learner-participants mentioned interest in the subject matter. The focus in most interviews was the desire for the perceived attributes of graduateness, “...in terms of generic characteristics and attributes... an attitude to knowledge and skills which is ‘content free” (Walsh & Kotzee, 2010, p.38). The learner desire for graduateness and professional progression aligns with the political rhetoric, which suggests that the development of the ‘high-level’ skills associated with higher education, are:

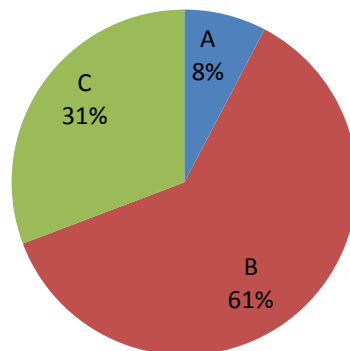
“...Good for the individuals who acquire them and good for the economy. They help individuals unlock their talent and aspire to change their life for the better. They help businesses and public services innovate and prosper” (DIUS, 2008, p.3)

PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment adopted by the LMATI FDA appear to develop the skills and attributes the stakeholders (learners, employers and politicians) expect, mirroring the, “...trans disciplinary nature of learning in the workplace and the acceptance by those concerned in supporting such learning that it does not fall into the neatly ordered categories of the disciplines” (Walsh & Kotzee, 2010, p.39).

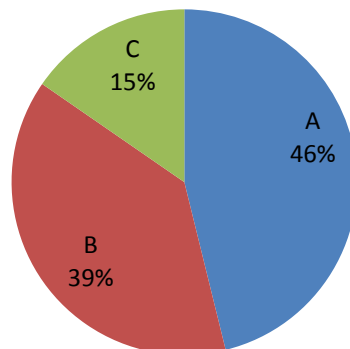
5.4 Impact of PF on Institutions and Staff

This paper has considered the range of stakeholder drivers for PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. In the case of the LMATI FDA the employer and employee voice has impacted significantly on the need to develop an innovative, blended programme that delivers both personal and professional impact. However, PF approaches may also impact upon the quality and performance goals of the educational establishment/s (in the case of the LMATI FDA - Exeter College and the University of Exeter) and the experience of staffs. Quantitative measures from the first LMATI FDA cycle suggest that PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have supported the achievement of institutional drivers such as value added and achievement/success:

Number of students per mark achieved (Year 1)



Number of students per mark achieved (Year 2)



The PF approach is not without challenges for staff and institutions. The experience of the Programme Director (PD) suggests that the more innovative the learning and assessment structure the more robust and transparent the administrative and course management elements must be (Smith, 2010, p.23). The creation of a solid administrative structure, with complete and transparent documentation has been key to mitigating the risk of disengagement and ensuring retention due to the unfamiliar and sometimes complex assessment structure.

The synoptic PF structure does not always map onto existing institutional processes, which are predominantly designed to capture information by (teaching and learning) module or at the end of discrete blocks of assessment. This has not been an insurmountable problem but adds to the administrative role, as the PD must create bespoke administrative forms, systems or approaches that meet the requirements of the partner institutions.

The requirement for academics to collaborate to design and deliver effective PF programmes has been cited as a barrier to engagement in some literature. Price et al. comment that achieving such a programme focus is likely to “require both a creative and a team approach” (2011, p.490). In the case of the LMATI FDA the opposite has been true – the Programme Director is the sole member of staff, with an overview of all teaching, learning and assessment elements. The appointment of a single individual, who has overall responsibility for ensuring that the programme level outcomes are achieved, appears to have supported adherence to the principles of PF teaching, learning and assessment but this approach is unlikely to be viable when delivering large, university-based courses. There is also an acknowledgement that this approach to staffing is potentially high risk and has implications for sustainability.

6 Ongoing evaluation and implications for Higher Education

This paper argues that a Programme-Focus (PF) can deliver increased impact for both students and stakeholders. It offers an evidence-based evaluation of the development and delivery of a new programme - the Leadership and Management in the Air Travel Industry Foundation Degree (LMATI FDA), which was designed to deliver impact for stakeholders by ensuring that all major elements (mode of delivery, teaching, learning and assessment activities) serve the programme level aims.

The formal espousal of the LMATI FDA programme level outcomes can be summarized as, the development of strategic leadership skills and the application of higher level thinking skills. The emphasis is then placed upon using these skills to support personal progression and “...explore issues such as resource allocation, business improvement and service enhancement” (LMATI FDA, 2010). This ‘research’ is far from conclusive – the group of interviews is too small to constitute a ‘sample’ and the role of the PD as interviewer raises a number of questions about validity and reliability but nonetheless, the comments of learner and manager-participants do suggest that the programme level outcomes have been well served by the PF teaching, learning and assessment strategies adopted. Both sets of interviews indicate significant changes have occurred in the behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities of the employees and employer directly involved with the programme.

6.1 Why Does Programme Focus Matter?

Programme-focused approaches to teaching, learning and assessment place the focus upon finding the most effective way of engendering learning and delivering value for stakeholders. This paper suggests that although assessment strategies may not be ‘sexy’, the results can be. The LMATI FDA evaluation indicates that PF approaches have supported:

- Employer engagement
- Impact for learner and organisation
- Learner achievement
- Development of the ‘learning habit’

Knight (2001, p. 371) argues that many undergraduates currently have to create coherence out of curriculum disintegration. Programme-focused approaches challenge students to create coherence, itself ‘good learning’ but these challenges are fore-grounded and teaching, learning and assessment strategies support the development of the skills to allow the construction of deeper meaning.

In the case of the LMATI FDA, aligning PF teaching, learning and assessment strategies was possibly the only way to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. The involvement of the partner employer in the design, delivery and programme assessment, in line with Knight’s thinking, has demanded clarity and transparency about programme level aims and the teaching learning and assessment strategies adopted to achieve them:

“If higher education institutions also provide summaries of the key learning, teaching and assessment processes associated with each programme of studies – of their process standards – stakeholders would be more able to scrutinize claims and warrants alike”
(2002a, p. 285)

6.2 Conclusion

PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have actively supported the delivery of an authentic leadership and management programme, which has delivered significant changes in the behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities of the employees and employer directly involved with the programme. The innovative PF approaches to assessment adopted by the programme team can logically be assumed to have contributed to the programme impact.

Wojcik (1996) puts forward a strong case for corporations to become learning organizations in order to survive competitively and these interviews suggest a number of benefits for an organisation willing to invest strategically and financially in developing an educational programme, which aligns with both commercial and individual employee drivers. The ‘ripple effect’ of the LMATI FDA has impacted not only on the 13 learner-participants and their colleagues and managers. The manager interviews highlighted the impact of the LMATI FDA upon the wider workforce, first “...creating a stir” (Manager C) and subsequently engendering a, “...belief that there is an opportunity to develop if they want to and to develop with the support of the company” (Manager B). Understanding the qualitative and quantitative impacts of PF course design may have a significant role to play in engaging more employers in work-based learning. It is hoped that the positive indications provided by this paper will generate a desire for more robust longitudinal evaluations, which enable stakeholders “...to scrutinize claims...” (2002a, p. 285) of the value of PF approaches to teaching, learning and assessment

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Appendix 1

Curriculum Design Team

The original curriculum design team comprised of:

Jackie Bagnall – Deputy Director One Planet MBA, Senior Lecturer – Leadership, University of Exeter <http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/cls/about/>

Gerry Hinton – Teaching Fellow – Centre for Leadership Studies (CLS), The Business School, University of Exeter

Alexandra (Sandy) Williams – Faculty of Business and IT, Exeter College (at time of course design), now Senior Lecturer, Department of Management, The Business School, University of Exeter

Appendix 2

Learner Impact

Professional Confidence:

Enhanced confidence was a recurring theme throughout the learner-participant interviews but the perceived impacts of this increased 'trust in the self' were varied. Learners made direct links between their confidence levels and the effectiveness of their professional practice:

"It's made my job easier, for me to do, if you know what I mean because I personally feel more confident, I can do my job better" (Participant 04)

"Because I'm more confident in what I'm doing I don't get angry with people, I'm just... I'm more tolerant of people and I try to understand their point of view..." (Participant 04)

A number of participants highlighted an increased awareness of, and commitment to, an existing management approach but felt that this was now 'validated' by research and reflection:

"I think what you learn during the course is that some things you're sort of aware at the back of your head suddenly get a title or a category, or you suddenly realise there's a whole subject to them..." (Participant 01)

Equally as important as this increase in professional confidence was a corresponding development of 'academic' confidence:

"...It made me much more, academically confident, I hadn't been a student for 18-20 years and I was a pretty poor student when I was one... I wouldn't now fear doing other academic stuff – so that was good. " (Participant 05)

'Habit of Learning':

Learner-participants identified a newfound enjoyment of learning, which seemed especially significant for those whose last experience of formal education was distant and / or disappointing:

"...It's given me an insight into learning again and the fact I actually enjoyed learning which is, having been with the company for so long, I really haven't done any learning... I think its open my eyes to the learning that is out there..." (Participant 01)

These comments are a stark reminder that 'work based learning' is not just about employability / economic agendas. As one participant commented, during the course he developed "...a habit of learning" (Participant 05).

Commercial Knowledge:

The two-year programme supports "...managers [to] develop strategic leadership by looking across management and business functions (Managing People and Organisations, Marketing, Finance, Operations Management and Project & Change Management) through applying higher level thinking skills to explore issues such as resource allocation, business improvement and service enhancement"

(LMATI FDA, 2010, p.12). Learner-participants identified improvements in professional knowledge, which stemmed from the cross-functional focus of the assessments, such as requirements to broaden their company knowledge beyond their own department or specialism (Participant 05), research the airline industry context and understand the strategic goals of different business functions (Participant 08). PF teaching and learning methods, such as the cross-departmental enquiry circles, also assist with this knowledge development:

“...Enquiry circles on the course helped to understand the streams of communication within the company” (Participant 08)

Interpersonal Skills:

Effective communication was a recurring theme in the learner-participant interviews:

“My communication, particularly with using things like email, which used to be very awkward has totally changed.” (Participant 03)

“You learn to write without personalising and make sure there is detail and not suppositions, being more factual.” (Participant 04)

“I also learnt a lot about the kind of speak as you’re spoken to, how you listen, how you take away the information.” (Participant 08)

“When you need to get to the nub of the question and get to the point early on [in academic assignments] has helped... when I’ve been writing those business papers which can only really be two sides of A4 at the most.” (Participant 07)

The learner-participant perception of significant growth and development in the area of communication was borne out by corresponding comments by senior management in subsequent interviews.

Reflective Professional Practice:

Similarly, learner-participants identified a shift towards evidence-based approaches and a reduction in subjective or reactive responses as a result of reflective skill development:

“I think it’s had a massive impact on me, and the way I approach my work. I find myself being more analytical now...” (Participant 04)

“...The power of reflection, is perhaps one of the things that has been one of the biggest learning experiences for me...” (Participant 06)

“I’m less reactive to situations and more willing to take a step back and think well okay, that’s happened but why has it happened and could I have done things differently.” (Participant 07)

Reflecting on experience can lead to more effective professional practice but one of the greatest challenges for working managers is affording the appropriate time to reflect on their learning. In recognition of this, the PLT is designed to provide regular formative feedback (from an academic tutor and/or workplace mentor).

Solution Focused Approaches:

A corresponding benefit of the PLT system is the emphasis on solutions. Coupled with the PBL ethos of the programme these PF teaching, learning and assessment strategies aim to engender solution-focused approaches:

“I’ve definitely transposed the way in which, if I want to address a problem, even writing it in such a way that you are highlighting an area of concern and an area that can be improved but focusing on that rather than the problem.” (Participant 06)

“...It’s got me into that sort of mindset of thinking not so much, there’s something wrong somebody ought to fix it but there is something there that might be able to be changed for the better and perhaps I might be able to do something about it...” (Participant 09)

This links to the emphasis on strategic approaches mentioned by others, who commented that they had learnt to “focus on the priorities” (Participant 10).

Professional Progression:

When learner-participants were asked to talk about the impact of the course upon their career progression a mixed picture emerged. One respondent had been promoted and directly attributed this progression to his participation in the programme:

“...A significant step up the ladder and probably puts me towards the senior management team, rather than the junior middle, which is where I was when I started the course...” (Participant 07)

“I use the thinking now from the course a lot more readily day-to-day I’d like to think that it had an influence and an impact and that its given me the skills to push my career that bit further...” (Participant 07)

Another student stated that promotion was not an expected outcome of undertaking the course:

“I didn’t expect it to though to be honest... and that was never the reason for doing it” (Participant 02)

Others felt that the programme had increased their professional ‘standing’ but commented that changes in role may come later as their area was re-structuring:

“I think also that our senior managers... appreciate that when those of us make contributions... who have been on the programme, that they are actually worth listening to...” (Participant 10)

Finally, two student expressed disappointment or doubt about potential opportunities for promotion arising as a result of participation in the programme:

“I’m a little disappointed that I haven’t had any further opportunities that have come up as a result of this...” (Participant 09)

“I don’t know how much credence the company has yet placed on it...” (Participant 04)

Appendix 3

Partner Employer – Senior Management Perspective

Five interviews were conducted with five Senior Managers and Directors between the 23rd and 27th of April. The managers interviewed were directly involved in supporting those enrolled on the LMATI FDA between 2009 and 2011. Their involvement varied from mentoring and supporting direct line reports enrolled on the programme to acting as a visiting ‘expert speaker’ during the two day Master Classes.

Organisational Impact:

All five managers viewed training and education as mutually beneficial to both the employee and the employer:

‘It is much easier to work with people who have those base skills than those who don’t...’
(Manager B)

‘...Also it [course participation] gives a benefit to me... the way that they respond...to the requests for information starts to make them put together responses that have some form of value, they get references, they have a firmer understanding of how to put a business case together. They start to see that you can’t just make statements without having the supporting documentation.’ (Manager A)

There was a feeling that this programme played an important role in a wider strategy of regional talent management:

‘Regional location makes up-skilling those who wish to live and work in area important – hard to compete on salary and lifestyle with major cities... to up-skill those that are already here and have chosen to be here for other reasons, seems to me objectively to be quite a good way to go about it’ (Manager B)

‘...I think that talent will know where the opportunity came from and it will remember that and they will probably be, one would hope, a little more inclined to stick around, if it works that way. Maybe being too optimistic but I don’t think so I think some will stay because they knew where that opportunity came from.’ (Manager B)

The manager-participants identified a number of specific instances of increased personal and professional effectiveness in staff, which they attributed to participation in the LMATI FDA:

‘...I’m not sure that I expected to see a change because the people that I put forward for the course you might describe as ‘mature student’s and therefore they were established managers in their field anyway... I wasn’t necessarily expecting to suddenly see them turn into graduates... Having said that, with all three who have completed the Foundation Degree, I have noticed a change and they do write their papers in a more analytical way, they will put forward arguments via email offering perhaps more support than they had before. So, I think I can see an improvement of the way they offer, suggestion, the written word and argument. So, yes, I have noticed a difference and it will give them more credence and more influence as a result’ (Manager C)

“...They are being driven to be much more research-orientated and reference orientated and just to be possibly a bit more balanced in their opinions...” (Manager A)

“...What I found is that you could see they were applying stuff that they had done during the course, they were applying it to their every day work, which I thought was tremendous...” (Manager E)

“...Their responses to me have been much fuller and a lot easier to pick up and run with much faster than I would have expected normally” (Manager A)

Manager B also felt that the integrated assessment structure of the programme yielded a more immediate impact:

“...It allows people to... not only to see the context for it but actually to develop what they are doing as they do their ‘day job’ as the course develops... you’re not waiting until the end of the two years to see the rewards you’re reaping the rewards [as the course goes on] in terms of the quality of the work those individuals can produce” (Manager B)

All the managers identified qualitative impact but several managers acknowledged that the quantitative value of new projects and processes arising directly from the programme (such as Business Improvement Projects) would take longer to manifest.

Professional Confidence:

The theme of increased confidence among alumni was also continued during the manager interviews:

“...It’s almost a straightening of the back. There is a little bit of a shoulder back and head up attitude” (Manager A)

“...The lady who reported to me, who did the course, it was all about a confidence thing and this was someone who I have worked with for years and have complete faith and confidence in and knew how intelligent she was, I don’t think she realised how intelligent she was if you know what I mean. So, I think what this did was give a recognition if you like of the aptitude that she’s got for learning and the aptitude that she’s got for actually understanding and delivering and working at a higher level” (Manager E)

Managers D and E echoed this sentiment, highlighting the importance of recognition for those who have skills and experience but previously lacked validation:

“...I came across people who felt I suppose that because they didn’t have a degree or they hadn’t had any real formal training that they were a) not as clever as other people in the business, which is obviously nonsense and b) that perhaps their development wasn’t going to be as good as someone who did have the qualifications...” (Manager E)

“...What it did do was give a confidence that what they had been doing in their career up to that point was actually correct but they now had a name for it or there was now a sort of an official recognition that it was the right way forward” (Manager E)

Impact on Own Practice:

Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of the manager-participants also felt that the programme had impacted on their own professional practice:

“...Reviewing the work that they have done makes you sit back, almost as an independent assessor you start to see the work and you start to see things in a slightly different vein”
(Manager A)

“...If you know that individuals around you, coming up behind you have those sorts of skills then you raise your own game and rightly so. You could argue you shouldn't have to but I don't think that's a bad thing. It's not a bad thing to be challenged at any level. And if those coming up are challenging you with, armed with the sort of skills and knowledge that this sort of course will give them I think that's got be hugely beneficial” (Manager B)

“...I think what it has done is make me more mindful about explaining things to people and actually taking the time to talk through decisions and policies and things that we're doing... I suppose it made me take more time and think about the rest of the people.” (Manager E)