

Programme Assessment Strategies
Funded by the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme

Staff Attitudes to Programme Level Assessment

Prepared by:
Richard Canham
Leeds Metropolitan University

24 September 2010

www.pass.brad.ac.uk

Table of Contents

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Methodology	1
2.1	Pilot survey and PLA definitions.....	1
2.2	The Survey.....	2
2.3	SCAPL Conference	3
2.4	Data analysis	3
3	Results	3
3.1	PLA definitions	3
3.2	The Survey and focus group.....	4
3.2.1	How well is the term “Programme Level Assessment” known?.....	4
3.2.2	<i>More familiar</i> staffs’ understanding of PLA.....	5
3.2.3	How beneficial is PLA?	6
3.2.4	Implementation issues.....	7
3.2.5	Where to find help	8
3.2.6	Knowledge of an example PLA.....	9
3.2.7	How successful was it?.....	11
3.2.8	Respondents’ Faculty	13
3.2.9	Who completed the survey?.....	13
3.2.10	Final Comments	14
3.3	Respondents background and bias	14
4	Conclusions and Learning Points	15
4.1	Learning Points.....	16
	Appendix A	18
	Survey Questions.....	18

Staff Attitudes to Programme Level Assessment

1 Introduction

This report is the result of work package 7 of the Programme Assessment Strategies Project (PASS). The work package's aim is to ascertain staff attitudes to programme level assessment (PLA) within Leeds Metropolitan University. This information will be combined with other work packages within the PASS project to enhance the understanding and provide evidence based information for PLA.

Staff attitudes were ascertained by undertaking a web based survey of programme, course and level leaders within the university. This information was augmented by a short workshop taken in the university's subject, course and programme leaders (SCAPL) conference. During this process a selection of definitions of PLA were generated to improve the survey response.

2 Methodology

A survey of staff attitudes to programme level assessment was required, using programme, course and level leaders, together with Associate Deans at Leeds Metropolitan University. A pilot survey confirmed that a survey would need to present the respondent with information regarding the nature of PLA to enable more to complete it, and so PLA definitions were generate. Information from a focus group was also used to augment the data from the survey. This methodology section gives brief details of this process, followed by a fuller description of the survey itself, together with the analysis and ethical considerations.

2.1 Pilot survey and PLA definitions

PLA is a loosely defined concept with many routes and strategies. One purpose of the survey was to ascertain staffs' understanding of the term. However, it became apparent that for many the term (and concept) was unknown or poorly understood and that many would require a definition, or further information to fully participate. It was feared that without this there would be a low completion of the survey and that a large element would not engage, and hence skew/limit the results.

Leeds Metropolitan University has a group of Teacher Fellows, a group of approximately 40 lecturers who are selected by application for three years on the basis of their credibility as excellent teachers. A web-based pilot survey, with no definition of PLA was distributed to the teacher fellows and feedback supported the concern, with the requests/recommendation from several for more information.

To overcome this issue the teacher fellows were asked to give their definitions of PLA. Themes from the responses were combined with information from the PASS project to produce some alternative definitions of PLA. These were not to be considered as correct or perfect definitions, but possible options to prompt the survey respondents.

2.2 The Survey

As stated, a survey of staff attitudes to programme level assessment was required, using programme, course and level leaders, together with Associate Deans at Leeds Metropolitan University. This group was specified as the Leadership Foundation has concentrated on this group.

Approximately twice a year, Leeds Metropolitan University has a day conference of its subject, course and programme leaders (SCAPL), and it was the distribution list of this group that was used to invite SCAPL members to complete the web based survey to find their attitudes. The list comprised 422 individuals.

The confidence of respondents was gauged by asking the respondents' familiarity with PLA. From this, one of two strands of questions was presented. For those with some knowledge, the definitions discussed in section 2.1 were given and their understanding of the term requested. Respondents were permitted to select more than one option and an additional *other* option was available. Those with little knowledge were presented with the example definitions and the statement

“Programme level assessment considers the issues of assessing at programme rather than individual modules. This can be achieved using various methods and strategies. Some examples are given below:”

The two strands then asked very similar questions to ascertain benefits, implementation issues, knowledge of PLA examples and how successful they had been. The strands differed by prefixing the question with statements to the effect of “given your understanding of programme level assessment ...” for more familiar respondents, or “given the above information ...” for those with less knowledge of PLA, where the above information was the definitions and introduction given earlier. The more familiar strand also asked if they knew where to find information about PLA.

Both question strands asked for the respondent's faculty and role in the course (course, level or module leader). A final free text option was given for any additional comments.

The survey was open for 25 days and was initiated by an email to the SCAPL distribution list that comprised 422 individuals. The university's teacher fellows were prompted to encourage course leaders to fill in the survey and Associate Deans for Assessment, Learning and Teaching were emailed after the survey had been open for a little under a week, to encourage course leaders in their faculty to complete the survey. Finally a *thank you* email was sent to all 422 entries on the SCAPL list two weeks after the survey opened, which was a week before it closed. A link to the survey was also included with a statement that, for those who had not already undertaken the survey, it was not too late to complete it.

Leeds Metropolitan University ethical approval was obtained and the following statement was given on the first page of the survey:

“This short survey's aim is to investigate perceptions of academic staff to programme level assessment. It should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

The information will be used by the Programme Assessment Strategies Project (PASS), which is a national project that Leeds Metropolitan University is working on with Bradford University and several other HE institutions. Its aim is to investigate evidence and guidelines for the use of programme level assessment.

Results from this survey will be disseminated as part of the project and may form part of scholarly work that may be published in various forms including the web. Extracts from free text answers may be quoted but your identity will not be known at any time.”

2.3 SCAPL Conference

As stated earlier in this section, Leeds Metropolitan University holds a day conference for subject, course and programme leaders (SCAPL). Fortuitously, a SCAPL day fell towards the end of the survey period and a 30 minute workshop was run within the SCAPL day to obtain additional information on PLA.

The workshop started with a brief introduction of the PASS project and PLA, after which participants were asked to work in groups to discuss the four definitions of PLA, stating what they felt was PLA, and giving advantages, disadvantages and examples where they have seen PLA. The numbers attending for the whole day were relatively low and approximately 30 took part in the workshop. Their responses were richer than the survey but followed the same questioning and so the results were integrated into the survey results.

2.4 Data analysis

The resulting data from the survey and focus group were analysed in an inductive, qualitative manner to elicit indicative themes. The small sample size was such that the results can only be used to promote discussion.

3 Results

This section details the results of the generation of PLA definitions and the web based survey (as described in section 2). These are detailed in sections 3.1 and 3.2 respectively.

3.1 PLA definitions

A pilot survey was given to the university's teacher fellows, which did not contain a definition of PLA (as described in section 2.1). The feedback confirmed the concern that the lack of definition would prevent engagement and so the teacher fellows were asked to give their definitions of PLA. These were not meant to be 'correct' definitions but options to encourage thought and debate of the respondents of the survey. Four strands were identified which were as follows:

1. *Discussion and decisions made at a programme level about the make-up of module assessment content*
2. *Operational view of diet and timing of assessments (e.g. assessment format, weighting, type and timing) taken at a programme level*
3. *Direct assessment of programme/level/stage learning outcomes*
4. *Assessing the integration of knowledge and skills from different modules in addition to module assessment*

Items one, three and four are consistent with the PASS project interpretation with PLA but item two is additional. There were a number of responses from the teacher fellows that included the concept of the *diet* of the assessment:

"An overview of the diet and modes/balance of assessment at that level - identifying types of assessment, weightings, outcomes to be assessed."

"... it includes diet of assessment, levelness of assessments, consistency."

Care was taken not to use the word synoptic (which occurred in some responses from the teacher fellows) as this is an equally loosely defined term.

3.2 The Survey and focus group

An email invitation to take the web-based survey on staff attitudes to PLA was sent to 422 subject, course and programme leaders within Leeds Met University. 123 responded (29% of those asked to take the survey) and started the survey with 93 (76% of those who started) completed it (i.e. viewed every page and clicked the submit button, rather than answering every question). This is a good response to an unsolicited survey, but has a high drop out rate, possibly indicating that the survey is difficult to complete or requires longer to complete than was anticipated by respondents.

The survey divided the questions into two strands and there are four options in understanding of PLA so care must be taken to consider the number of respondents who have complete a given question. For this reason the survey should be used to guide discussion and to inform further research.

The remained of this section details the response to each question. The survey questions can be seen in 0.

3.2.1 How well is the term “Programme Level Assessment” known?

As can be seen in Figure 1 there is a spread of knowledge, but it is biased towards being unfamiliar with the term. If 5 represented *very familiar* and 1 *never heard of the term* on a linear scale then the mean average is 2.5 (3.0 would represent the central position of the scale).

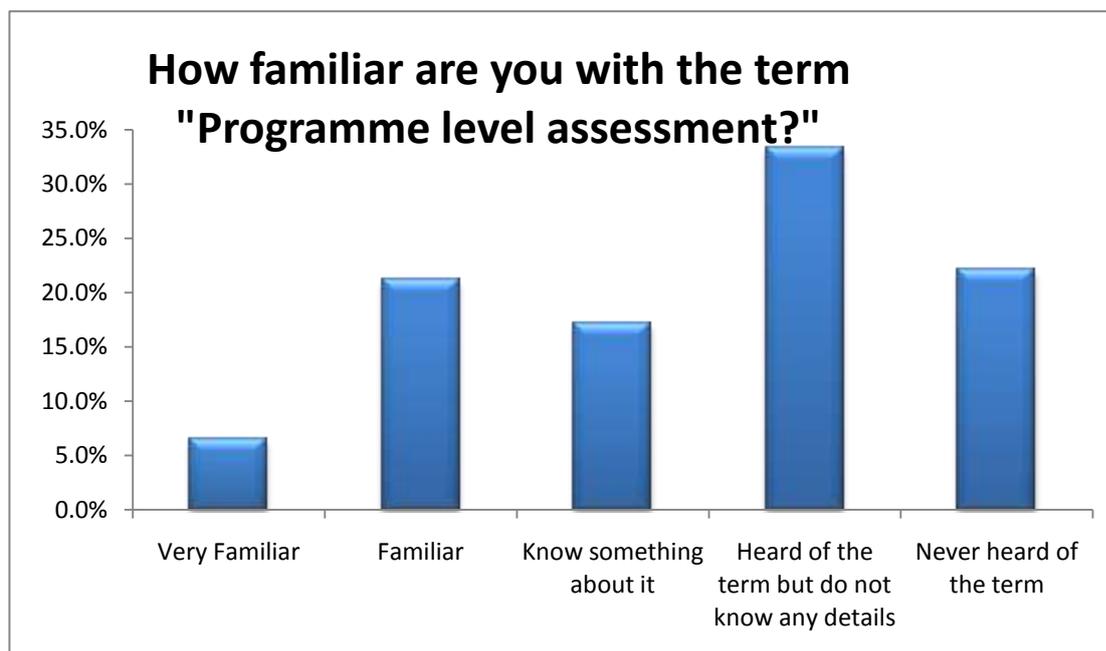


Figure 1: PLA familiarity (123 responses)

The response to this question determined which set of questions were then asked: *very familiar*, *familiar* and *know something about it* were assumed to know sufficient to be asked to define what they understood by the term (from the selection of options or a free text alternative, as described in section 2.1), while the remaining participants (those that had *heard of the term but do not know any details*, or had *never heard of the term*), were given some additional information regarding the possible alternatives. For clarity the two groups will be denoted as *more familiar* and *less familiar*

respectively. Of the 123 that took the survey, 55 (45% of those who started the survey) fell into the *more familiar* category and 68 (55% of those who started the survey) into the *less familiar* category.

3.2.2 *More familiar staffs' understanding of PLA*

Those who were *more familiar* with PLA were asked “Which of the following do you understand as ‘programme level assessment?’ Please select as many options as required.” Four alternative definitions were given (see section 3.1 and Table 1) together with *other*, should alternative ideas be present.

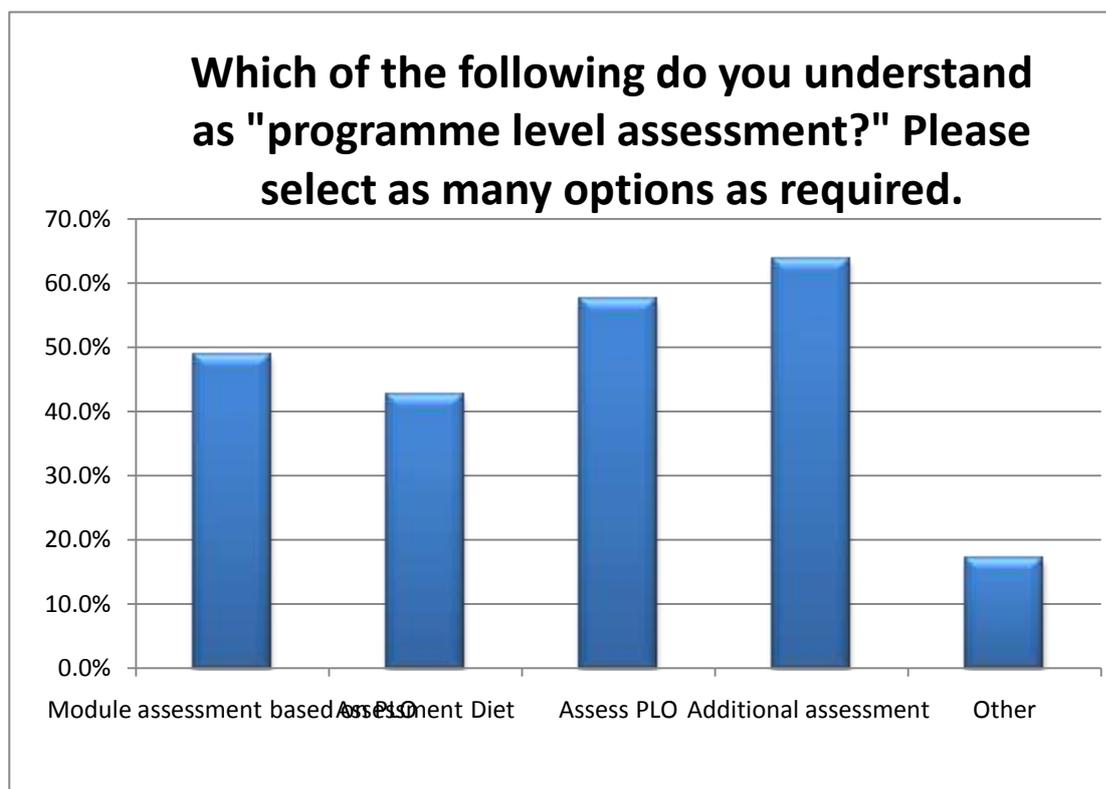


Figure 2: Understanding of PLA (47 responses)

As can be seen there is a wide spread across all alternative definitions. However, more than a single selection was possible and so most returns selected more than one option. In fact no responses considered just option 1 or option 2 as their understanding of PLA. However, 11% considered both of 1 and 2 as PLA. 15% considered just option 3 as PLA and 19% selected only option 4. Both options 3 and 4 were understood to be PLA in 9% of responses, and all options by 21% (the largest single group). All other combinations had very few responses. More investigations are necessary to understand if each option was considered PLA, or a combination of all selected options were considered to be PLA.

Option 1	Discussion and decisions made at a programme level about the make-up of module assessment content
Option 2	Operational view of diet and timing of assessments (e.g. assessment format, weighting, type and timing) taken at a programme level
Option 3	Direct assessment of programme/level/stage learning outcomes

Option 4	Assessing the integration of knowledge and skills from different modules in addition to module assessment
----------	---

Table 1: 4 PLA definitions

Of the 17% of responses that selected *other* only 4% did not also select at least one of the given options. There were few additional definitions beyond the four offered. “Assessment that spans a number of modules,” and “integration between the programme level assessment and the corporate vision/mission aspiration,” were offered. A number questioned the similarity to synoptic assessment but none defined what was meant by synoptic.

3.2.3 How beneficial is PLA?

The graph in Figure 3 shows how both sets of respondents (those with more, or less familiarity with PLA) consider the benefits of PLA. Due to the differing levels of understanding of PLA, slightly different questions were asked of each group: “Given your understanding of programme level assessment, is it/would it be beneficial?” and “Given the above information, do you feel it would be/is beneficial to use assessments that consider these factors?” (where the information given is discussed in sections 2.1 and 3.1) for those with more and less familiarity respectively. However, it can be seen that respondents heavily believed that PLA would either be beneficial or very beneficial (91% of all respondents thought this).

Many of the comments with this question used words such as “whole”, “integrated” and “bigger picture”. It was stated that PLA would provide an “overview of level/stage achievement,” “gives one an overall understanding of how the details are part of a whole,” and gave “joined up thinking across programmes.” It would also help “students to take a less parochial view of assessment and see the bigger picture” and reduce the “learn and dump’ mentality to each individual assessment.” Those less familiar with PLA also had a number of comments that the processes appear “obvious to do so” and “sound[s] very interesting.”

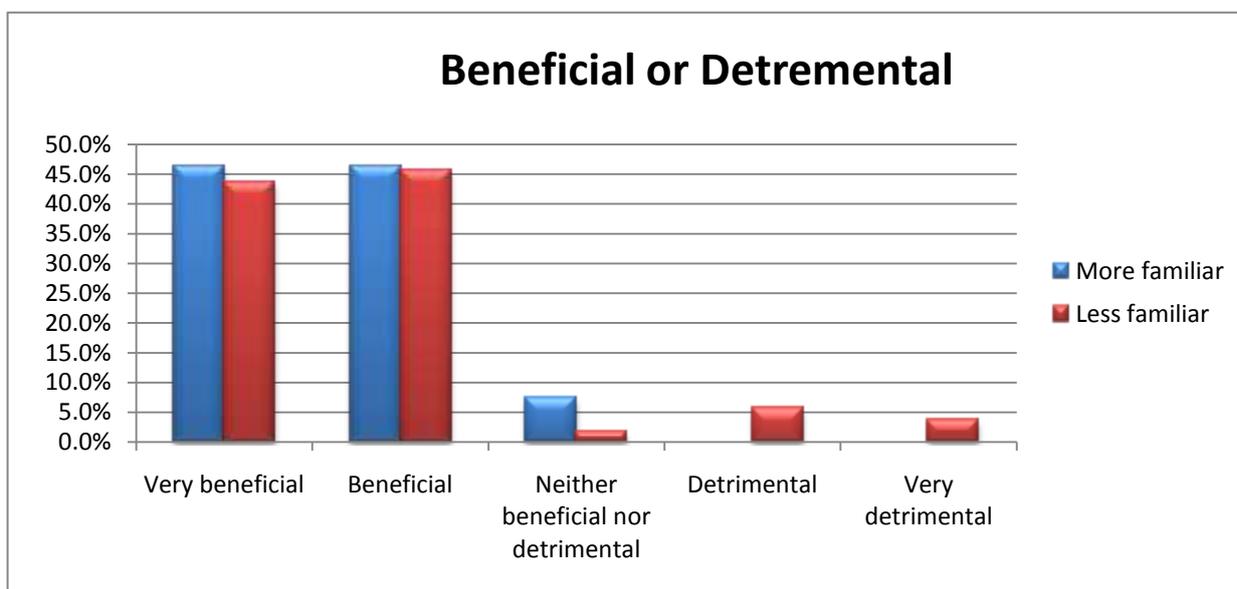


Figure 3: How beneficial is PLA? (41 and 55 responses for more familiar and less familiar respectively, resulting in 96 in total)

Giving the students a greater overview that could be “evidenced in the real world ... [and a] great marketing tool ‘employability’ and has increased student numbers on the course.”

However, some issues were highlighted: “Problems may arise where students have strengths in particular modules relating to module topics and weaknesses in other modules, which might make overall assessment more difficult.” Modules could be “accessed [by] students from across a range of programmes - this may for instance lead to the need to assess some at module level and others at programme level,” although this could be considered an issue with implementation. There was also a concern that some students may be unclear at the additional type of assessment: “I don't think a mix of module based and program based assessment would be clear so would not be appreciated by students, particularly threshold ones.”

When the different combinations of options were investigated the small sample size reduced the validity of the results and no clear picture emerged. There appeared to be no bias to a particular combination being especially beneficial or detrimental, and comments were also spread across the combination of options. However, all respondents who were *very familiar* with PLA stated that they felt PLA was *very beneficial*, although there were only four individuals who fell into this group.

3.2.4 Implementation issues

Both sets of respondents (those who are more or less familiar with PLA) considered it to be difficult to implement, as shown in Figure 4. Again, slightly different questions were asked of the two groups: “Is/would a programme level assessment be difficult to implement?” and “Do you feel it would/is difficult to implement a programme level assessment strategy considering the above examples?” for more and less familiar respectively (as discussed in section 2.1). If *very difficult* was given a value of 5 and *very easy* a value of 1 then the mean average would be 3.33 and 3.25 for more familiarity and less familiarity respectively, with a combined average of 3.29. Hence those with more familiarity with PLA consider it to be slightly more difficult to implement than those who are less familiar.

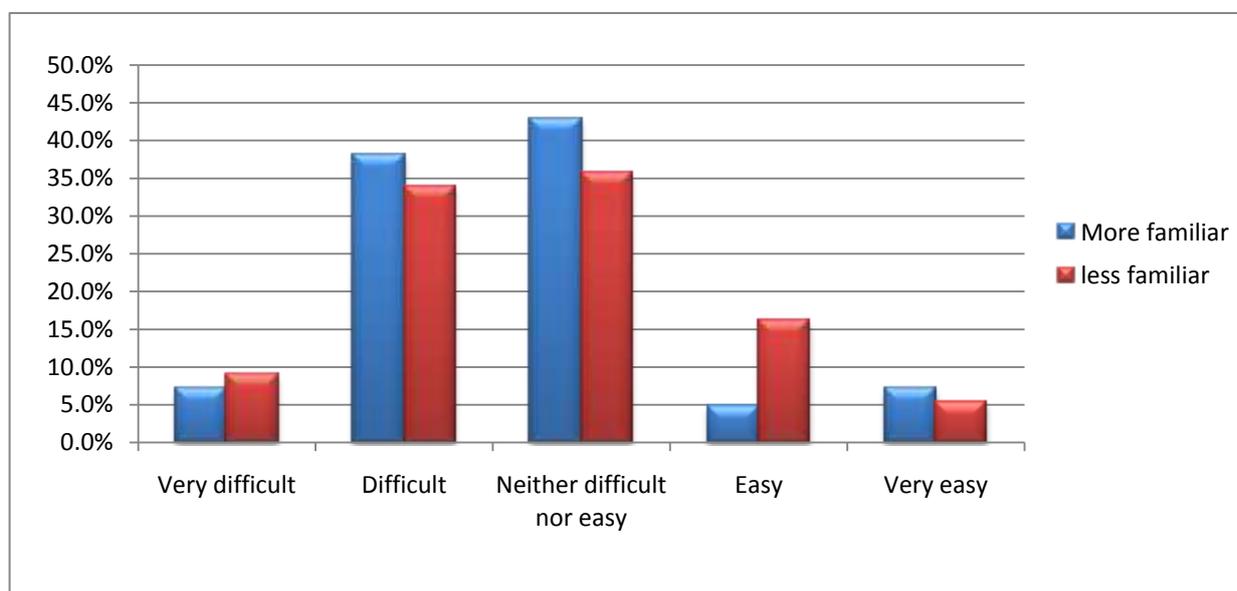


Figure 4: Implementation issues (responses: 42 more familiar, 56 less familiar and 98 combined)

Time, coordination and communications with colleagues were repeatedly cited as problems with implementation of PLA, with “[s]taff not keen on making changes,” “very focused on modular assessment.” and “don’t work closely together in planning.”

Also the authority and current organisation and systems could cause issues: “course leaders don’t have enough authority so depends on negotiation and open to blocking,” and “modules are controlled by subject groups [but] subject groups not matched with courses,” together with “the computerisation of ... module assessments [which] are recorded on the university system has made

it impossible.” “Modules [are] delivered in different sequences.” An issue was also cited that additional assessments across modules were “against criteria of [their] professional body.”

Also modules are shared across faculties and courses, which would cause difficulties; there is “no clear structure or process for the level of cross Faculty liaison [necessary]”. “[E]veryone has to buy into the programme which is often difficult.” However, it is “easy when there is a group approach to assessment,” and “designing assessment methods should come before the design of modules, otherwise the cart comes before the horse.” Also, “[I] always work in this way with course team over viewing the course.” Some specific examples were also given to demonstrate the ease of implementation (details can be found in section 3.2.6).

Concerns were expressed that larger assessments were required and the management and coordination could be a problem, especially its marking. “How to divide credit” for an assessment that covers multiple modules. Issues of failing an assessment that covered multiple modules were highlighted: “[we had] a portfolio assessment which covers 4 modules. The snag with that is that its a nightmare when a student fails because they have reached the limits of assessment in one single piece of work our regs will need looking at.” However, another thought that an assessment that covered multiple modules would be useful “in a context of a progression framework that allows students to progress with failed modules.”

Examining the different combinations of PLA did not reveal any noticeable trends in any individual or combination of types of PLA being associated with particularly difficult or easy implementation issues. Also, considering the finer grain of each familiarity category against difficulty of implementation gave no further information, other than those who were very familiar all thought that it would be *nether difficult nor easy*, or *very easy* to implement PLA. It should be noted that there were only four responses in this class.

3.2.5 Where to find help

Those who were more familiar with PLA were asked “Do you know where you can get guidance on developing programme level assessment strategies?” As can be seen in Figure 5, very few (13%) answered yes.

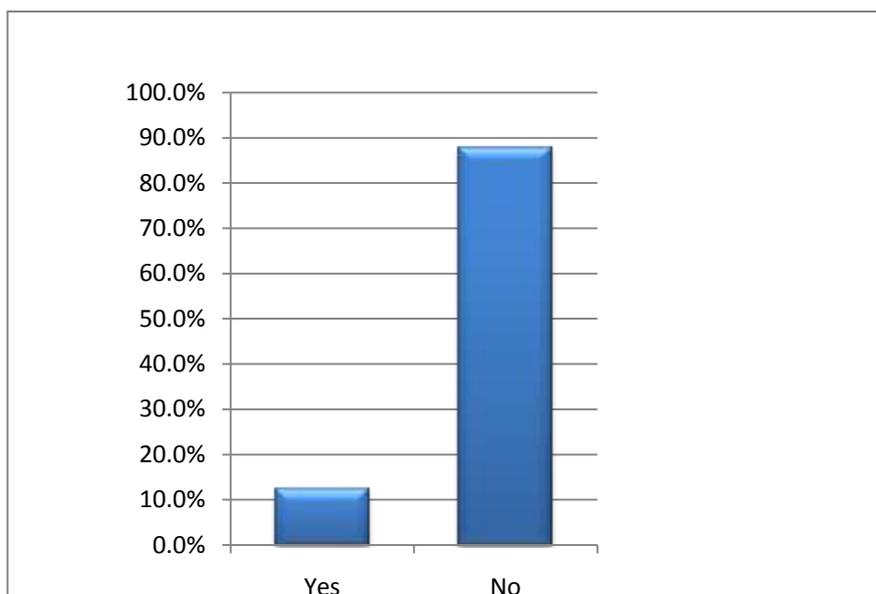


Figure 5: Do you know where you can get guidance on developing programme level assessment strategies? (41 responses)

However, one response was, “I with my colleagues have contributed to a guidance document for developing postgraduate/ level coaching awards in sport coaching which has this philosophy at its core.” The remaining free text responses indicated the web, or members of the Leeds Metropolitan University ALT (Assessment Learning and Teaching) group.

3.2.6 Knowledge of an example PLA

Figure 6 shows the number of respondents that knew of an example of PLA. Unsurprisingly there were more examples from those who were more familiar with PLA than those who were less familiar. Once more a slightly different question was asked: “Do you know of any programmes/courses that have a programme level assessment strategy?” compared to “Do you know any programmes that use any of the example strategies given above?”

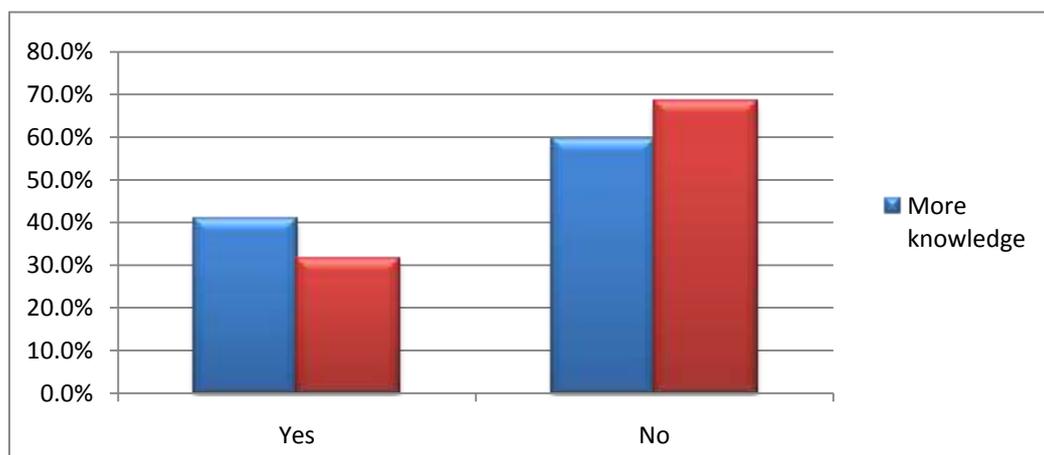


Figure 6: Knowledge of an example of PLA (responses: 42 more familiar, 57 less familiar, 99 combined)

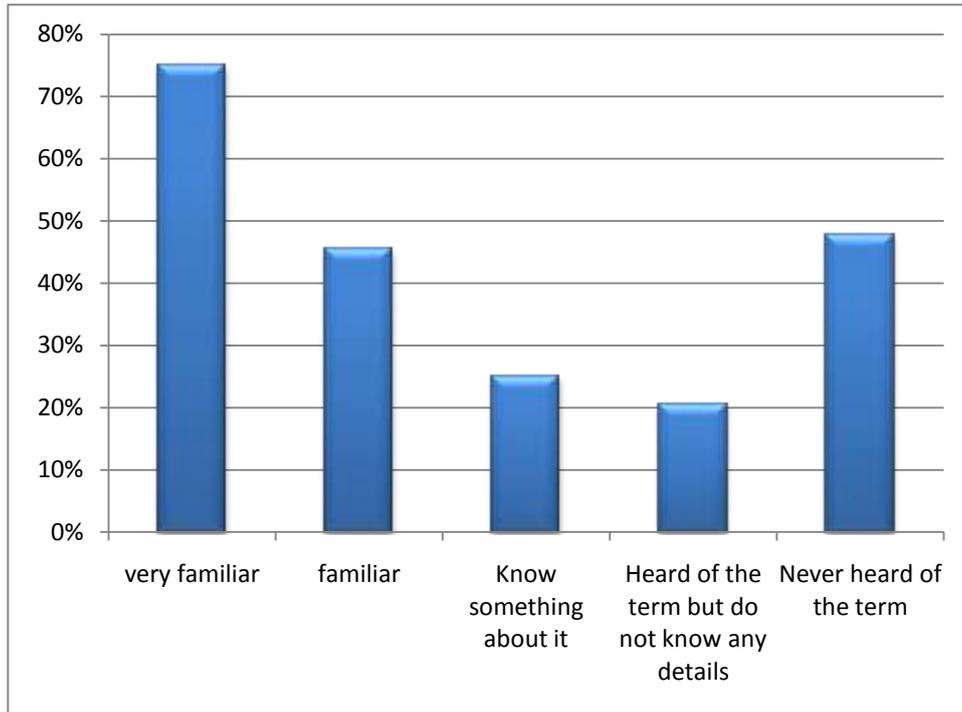


Figure 7: PLA example known versus detailed familiarity with PLA

When this is further broken down into the individual familiarity categories (see Figure 7) there is an apparent correlation which is relatively complex but appears to contain an element of familiarity with PLA with knowledge of PLA examples. Those who had never heard of the term have a surprisingly high knowledge of PLA examples, which would require further investigation to allow further comment.

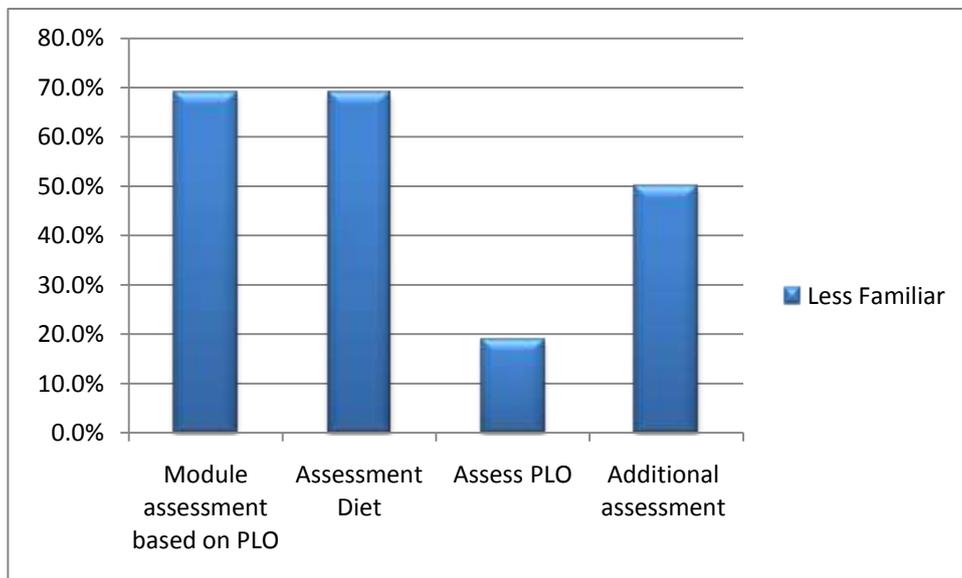


Figure 8: Strategies of know PLA by less familiar respondents (16 responses)

Less familiar respondents were asked, “Which strategies did it use?” and the four example PLA definitions were given, with responses as shown in Figure 8.

However, multiple options could be selected with the break down of combinations shown in Figure 9.

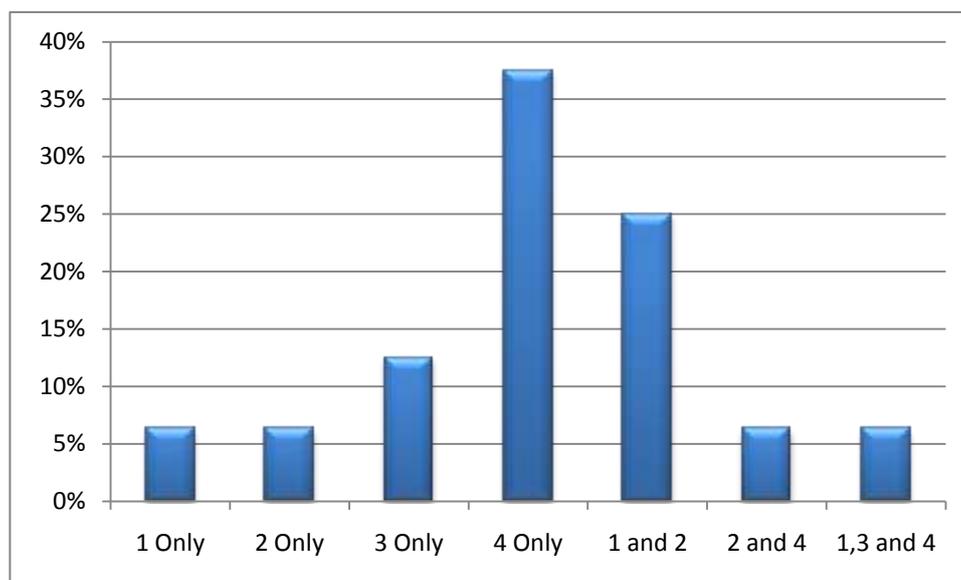


Figure 9: Combinations of PLA options for known PLA by those less familiar with PLA (16 responses)

As can be seen most know PLA examples use additional assessment to combine module knowledge and skills (option 4), a combination of module content and diet based upon the PLO (option 1 and 2), and assessing the PLOs directly. Free text responses lacked any additional clarity to the type of assessment used.

Those who were more familiar with PLA where not asked to specifically select the PLA strategy from the 4 options but gave free text responses, which included portfolios, viva, integrated task over/throughout level, integrated exams, practical work, project work, placement (work based learning), and viva. Portfolio was most often cited (23% from 13 answers). Some longer, specific answers were given:

“Our current level 3 consists of 2 60 credit point module that are assessed synoptically at the end of the year using the level learning outcomes. Ongoing formative assessment and negotiated learning is used throughout the year to ensure coherence. This is a very effective format for assessment that we have used for many years, and it is unlikely that we will change it.”

And

“My experience is primarily with design based courses which by their nature are integrative and often involving synoptic assessment.”

Note these two answers were in response to the question regarding the difficulty of implementing PLA (section 3.2.4).

3.2.7 How successful was it?

Of those who knew of a PLA example 82% considered it either successful or very successful. The break down of this can be seen in Figure 10; those who were less familiar with PLA reported a higher proportion of successful examples.

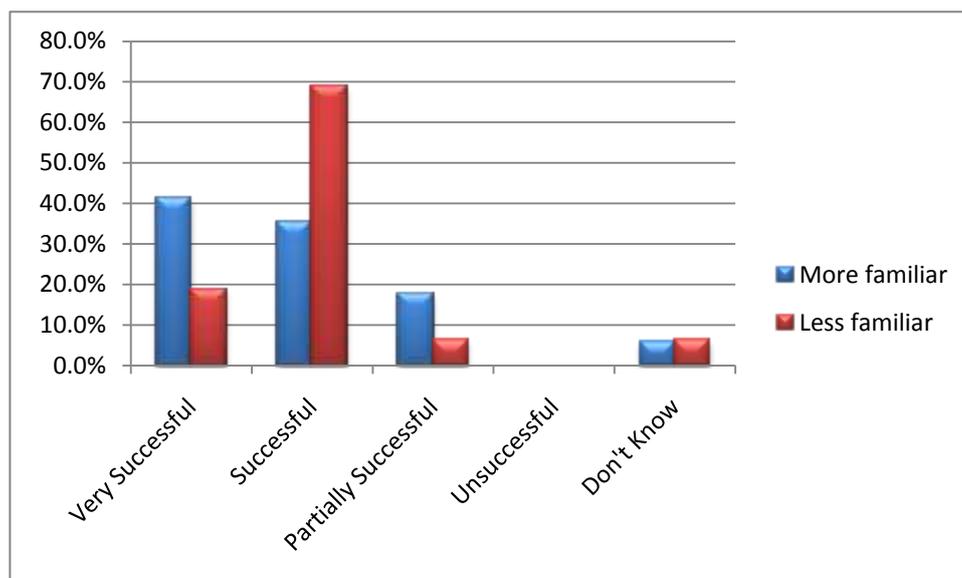


Figure 10: “How successful would you describe the assessment?” (16 less familiar responses, 17 more familiar responses, resulting in 33 in total)

The free text for the success for example PLAs highlighted the discrimination between good and poor students:

“... the best students are doing really well, the students who don't engage in the level of meta-cognition required tend to produce functional work. However, they often see the gaps in their approach upon completion their learning and assessment.”

And

“... weaker students generally found it difficult...”

Other points made in the free text echoed the advantages of PLA that provides “a course-wide, holistic approach ... makes for a more coherent programme of study.” “[It] allows for personal development and appropriate to the nature of design project work.” The PLA example also was “more representative of 'the real world' than at modular level ... [and] gave a better measure of deep and integrated learning.” However, as predicted in the section considering implementation issues, it was found that “the assessment goes well - but the delivery is very intensive and demanding for the tutors.”

3.2.8 Respondents' Faculty

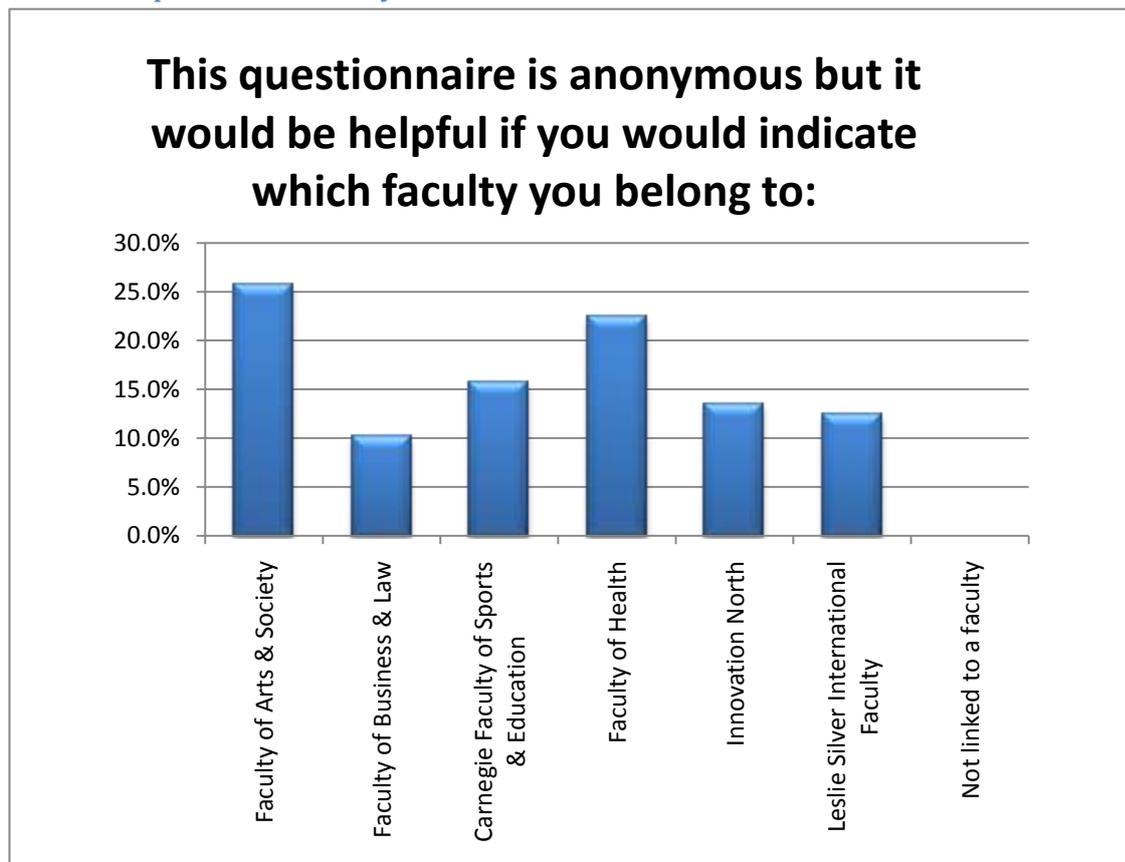


Figure 11: Respondents' faculty (89 responses)

Leeds Metropolitan University is currently split into six faculties and the respondents were asked to identify which faculty they belong to. As can be seen in Figure 11, there was a range of responses, but all areas of the university were represented.

3.2.9 Who completed the survey?

The survey was sent out to a list of subject, course and programme leaders (SCAPL). However, a number of people on the list had been level, or course leaders but are no longer so. However, they have continued to remain on the list due to their position within the subject group. Figure 12 shows the highest level given by each respondent (i.e. if both module leader and level leader were selected then this is displayed as level leader)

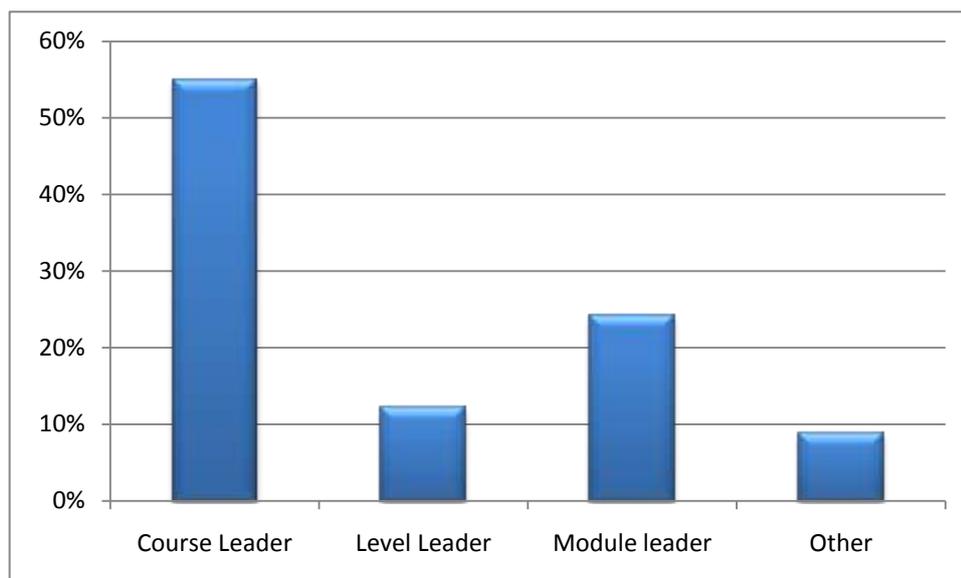


Figure 12: Course role (91 responses)

As can be seen 67% of respondents were level leader or course leader. A further 5% of respondents who selected *other* were programme leaders or subject group heads.

3.2.10 Final Comments

The final question was free text and asked “Please add any other comments you have about programme level assessment.” Nineteen of the 123 respondents left a final comment which had a number of topics, but two contradictory themes were apparent. In one instance PLA is a “[g]reat initiative. Would encourage some really creative assessment opportunities,” and “[could] be very useful to aid broad learning and reduce repetition.” “If we compartmentalise learning through modules we shouldn’t be surprised if both staff and students begin to see ... modules as mini courses in their own right and rarely look for links across modules never mind a whole course.” “It’s got to be key to helping our students be more satisfied,” and it “should be an integral part of all courses and easy to implement when a group is working together.” Also, “[i]t would be highly beneficial for Course Leaders to be able to look at assessment holistically.” Several wanted more information: “[i]t would be helpful to learn more eg at Staff Development festival.”

However, it was questioned if it is “wise to engage in assessment which is singularly demanding in terms of administration.” Also, “why have the University chosen to focus on it... sounds like another ‘next big thing.. yawn yawn... haven’t we had enough!!!” It should be noted that the very positive greatly outnumbered the negative several time over.

There were concerns about the difficulty of PLA: “[it] requires a substantial change in behaviour across all levels of the institution” and “[c]ould be a problem for professional accreditation in the Accounting field.” These were also contradicted by comments that demonstrated that PLA schemes were currently being implemented without difficulty: “[s]ounds very like synoptic assessment by another name which is a system which many courses involved with design project work have used for a long time.”

3.3 Respondents background and bias

The respondents of the survey are subject, course and programme leaders (SCAPL). This may present a population with a greater interest in Assessment, Learning and Teaching (ALT) than the general lectureship within the university. Furthermore, those who completed the survey maybe a subgroup

within SCAPL with the greatest interest in ALT. Further investigation would be necessary to establish the degree of bias, and a survey or focus group of a more random sample of the university's lecturers may provide this.

With regard to institutional initiatives in PLA or other associated subjects, the author knows of none that would adversely affect the survey's results. In previous years it was good practice within the university to cascade programme outcome and map them against assessment during a course validation. As of September 2009 it is part of the validation process to do so in a comprehensive manner.

4 Conclusions and Learning Points

Constructing and running the survey demonstrated the loose understanding of PLA and that many are not familiar with the term or concept. This posed a problem as one of the purposes of the survey was to gain an understanding of how staff perceived PLA, but the survey was in danger of having low uptake without defining what PLA was, or at least some options. This was overcome by requesting definitions of PLA from Leeds Metropolitan teacher fellows', which was combined with information from the PASS project to derive some possible definitions to present as survey options. These were not intended to be correct or definitive but to provide options to prompt the survey respondents.

Four definitions were generated and were as follows:

1. *Discussion and decisions made at a programme level about the make-up of module assessment content*
2. *Operational view of diet and timing of assessments (e.g. assessment format, weighting, type and timing) taken at a programme level*
3. *Direct assessment of programme/level/stage learning outcomes*
4. *Assessing the integration of knowledge and skills from different modules in addition to module assessment*

It was felt that these were consistent with PASS understanding of PLA, except definition 2 which was additional. During the survey no further concepts or alternative consensus emerged.

The degree of familiarity of PLA was asked and only those who were *very familiar, familiar* or *know something about it* were asked to select from the definitions given. All of the options were selected relatively evenly by the respondents, but definition two was the lowest. However, more than a single option could be selected and none felt that option one or two were individually understood as PLA. The combination of definitions one and two were understood to be PLA by 11% of respondents. However, definition three and four were each understood as PLA by 15% and 19% of respondents and 9% thought the combination of definition three and four was PLA. This would suggest that assessing the PLO, level, or stage directly or with additional assessing module interactions (or both) was considered PLO by approaching half (43%) of respondents as apposed to 11% who felt PLA was modular assessment (content and diet) that was set considering the PLO, in a top-down manner. Additionally 21% felt all four definitions were PLA. The remaining responses were spread over the other combinations of definitions.

When considering the remaining questions of benefits or implementation issues, no marked bias towards the type of PLA was detectable. Also, the large number of different combinations of

definitions (and hence low sample size) would not allow for a meaningful in-depth investigation to take place. Further research would be necessary.

There was a wide spread of differing familiarity with PLA but this averaged on the unfamiliar. Those who had *never heard the term* PLA, or those who had *heard of it but do not know any details* were not asked for a definition but given the four definitions as examples of what PLA may be and the remaining questions were adjusted to accommodate this. Despite this range, it was noticed that, in broad terms, these who were more familiar, or less familiar gave responses which had similar trends.

There was interest in the concept from staff, both in the survey's responses and feedback from the SCAPL workshop. Several free text responses stated that it was interesting and would like to find out more. Also the relatively high response rate of those who undertook the survey from those invited may be an indicating that PLA was of interest. This may be due to the perceived benefits (91% thought it would be beneficial or very beneficial) that could bring integration and a better overview than assessing only in a modular way.

PLA was also thought to be difficult to implement, with coordination, time and communication an issue being cited most often. Others stated that coordination was not considered a problem if the team worked together. Modules shared across courses or faculties and elective modules were also highlighted as potential for concern. How would these be assessed? Failure in an assessment that covered multiple modules was questioned: would all modules be failed? How would the credits be split? Some systems and organisational structures were thought to be inappropriate for PLA, or that considerable change would be needed to incorporate PLA. However, others stated that PLA had been implemented, sometimes with ease, in just the manner that was thought incompatible. There appears to be considerable differences in systems, or interpretation, or perception of them.

Furthermore, some subjects routinely include project work that incorporates skills and materials from many modules and is considered a natural and essential part of the course. Are these PLA, or appreciated as such? Portfolios were the PLA example referred to most often. It could be speculated that different subject areas have significant differences in practice and expectations when considering PLA. Would staff in areas where PLA was uncommon, be amenable to change? Do these different areas have different strategies in terms of shared modules and other perceived impediments to PLA? An increase in coordination and communication would appear necessary: would this stifle the staff with an extra burden or would the coordination enhance the course?

Further investigation is necessary to resolve these questions but the potential benefits and interest would suggest that it would be an appropriate investment in resources.

4.1 Learning Points

- PLA is a loosely defined concept with varying strategies and implementations, but may include assessment at modular level, considering the PLO (of both content and diet), and/or assessing over multiple modules (programme, level or stage), and may include, or may be an additional assessment to the modular assessment.
- There is wide range of knowledge and understanding of PLA within the staff at Leeds Metropolitan University, but there is considerable interest.
- PLA is felt to have the potential to be beneficial or very beneficial but may be difficult to implement.

- There is contradiction in understanding of systems or regulations and issues over PLA which some feel could make the process impractical while there are several examples where PLA is being successfully implemented at Leeds Metropolitan University.
- The survey raises questions regarding these differences that warrant further investigation.

Appendix A

This appendix details the questions used in the survey. It was designed and implemented using SurveyMonkey (see www.surveymonkey.com for details). Several branches were implemented depending upon previous questions, which are denoted in *italics* and were not seen by the user. Questions are shown in bold with options shown below with bullet points. Additional text below allows free text answers and a * denotes a compulsory question. If no options are given to a question then a free text answer was allowed. When more than one selection is possible, this is denoted in the question. Question numbers were not displayed, and on completion the user was redirected to the PASS web page (www.pass.brad.ac.uk).

Survey Questions

This short survey's aim is to investigate perceptions of academic staff to programme level assessment. It should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

The information will be used by the Programme Assessment Strategies Project (PASS), which is a national project that Leeds Metropolitan University is working on with Bradford University and several other HE institutions. Its aim is to investigate evidence and guidelines for the use of programme level assessment.

Results from this survey will be disseminated as part of the project and may form part of scholarly work that may be published in various forms including the web. Extracts from free text answers may be quoted but your identity will not be known at any time.

1. How familiar are you with the term "Programme level assessment?"*

- Very Familiar
- Familiar
- Know something about it
- Heard of the term but do not know any details
- Never heard of the term

If the answer to question 1 is either Very familiar, familiar, or know something about it, then the follow questions are presented. Otherwise, (i.e. question 1 answer is never heard of the term, or heard of the term but do not know any details) question 9 is displayed.

2. Which of the following do you understand as "programme level assessment?" Please select as many options as required

- Discussion and decisions made at a programme level about the make-up of module assessment content
- Operational view of diet and timing of assessments (e.g. assessment format, weighting, type and timing) taken at a programme level
- Direct assessment of programme/level/stage learning outcomes
- Assessing the integration of knowledge and skills from different modules in addition to module assessment
- Other

3. Given your understanding of programme level assessment, is it/would it be beneficial?

Very beneficial

Beneficial

Neither beneficial nor detrimental

Detrimental

Very detrimental

Please give details of what the major benefits or problems are/would be?

4. Is/would a programme level assessment be difficult to implement?

Very difficult

Difficult

Neither difficult nor easy

Easy

Very easy

Please give us your reasons

5. Do you know where you can get guidance on developing programme level assessment strategies?

Yes

No

If yes, please give details

6. Do you know of any programmes/courses that have a programme level assessment strategy?*

Yes

No

If question 6 answers no then the survey jumped to question 14

7. What format did the programme level assessment take?**8. How successful would you describe the programme level assessment?**

Very Successful

Successful

Partially Successful

Unsuccessful

Don't Know

Please give details

Jump to question 14

The following questions were displayed to respondents who either had never heard the term Programme Level Assessment, or had heard of the term but do not know any details.

The following statement was given

Programme level assessment considers the issues of assessing at programme rather than individual modules. This can be achieved using various methods and strategies. Some examples are given below:

- 1 Discussion and decisions made at a programme level about the make-up of module assessment content
- 2 Operational view of diet and timing (e.g. assessment format, weighting, type and timing) of assessments taken at a programme level
- 3 Direct assessment of programme/level/stage learning outcomes
- 4 Assessing the integration of knowledge and skills from different modules in addition to module assessment

9. Given the above information, do you feel it would be/is beneficial to use assessments that consider these factors?

Very beneficial

Beneficial

Neither beneficial nor detrimental

Detrimental

Very detrimental

Please give details. Which examples (numbered 1-4 above) do these relate to?

10. Do you feel it would/is difficult to implement a programme level assessment strategy considering the above examples?

Very difficult

Difficult

Neither difficult nor easy

Easy

Very easy

Please give details. Which examples (numbered 1-4 above) do these relate to?

11. Do you know any programmes that use any of the example strategies given above? *

Yes

No

If the answered to question 11 is no then jump to question 14

12. Which strategies did it use?

Discussion and decisions made at a programme level about the make-up of module assessment content

Operational view of diet and timing of assessments (e.g. assessment format, weighting, type and timing) taken at a programme level

Direct assessment of programme/level/stage learning outcomes

Assessing the integration of knowledge and skills from different modules in addition to module assessment

Please give details

13. How successful would you describe the assessment?

- Very Successful
- Successful
- Partially Successful
- Unsuccessful
- Don't Know
- Please give details

All respondents were asked the remaining questions

14. This questionnaire is anonymous but it would be helpful if you would indicate which faculty you belong to:

- Faculty of Arts & Society
- Faculty of Business & Law
- Carnegie Faculty of Sports & Education
- Faculty of Health
- Innovation North
- Leslie Silver International Faculty
- Not linked to a faculty

15. What are your roles on your course? Please tick all boxes that apply.

- Course leader
- Level leader
- Module leader
- Other

16. Please add any other comments you have about programme level assessment:

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It is greatly appreciated.

Click the submit button below to record your answers and you will be taken to the PASS project website.