



The Learning Experience Portfolio

PORTFLOW CASE STUDY

Transforming Education with Holistic Assessment



*Propelling Learner Agency
at Fontys University of Applied Sciences*

Portflow



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PORTFLOW CASE STUDY

*“Portflow allows us to
flexibly organise
programme-level assessment
throughout our curriculum”*



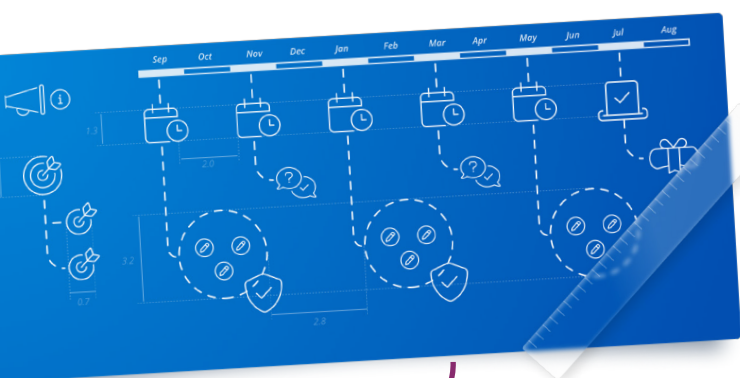
Portflow

1. Designing Higher Education Curricula to Prepare Students for Lifelong Learning



Students are increasingly being prepared for jobs that don't exist yet. Rapid change is a constant. Hence, society needs professionals that can quickly adapt to these changes in their environment and who are lifelong learners. This requires education to focus more on empowering students to develop important skills, competencies, and attitudes in addition to the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. It also requires more attention to the learning process itself.

Recognising the need to address this issue, the bachelor program Communication Event Music and Entertainment Studies (CO-IEMES, recently known as Creative Concepts for Communication), based in the Academy for the Creative Economy (ACE), a department from Fontys University of Applied Sciences in Tilburg, The Netherlands, started implementing **programmatic assessment**, a form of *holistic assessment*.



Programmatic assessment



Programmatic assessment is a pedagogical framework, originating from medical programmes, that aims to optimise decision-making and learning from assessment by spreading out assessments more equally throughout a course, module, or programme. Specifically, these measurements, also known as data points, are mostly low-stakes and intermediate stakes. This means that these do not lead to any decision on whether a student can pass a course or proceed to the next year. The focus of these data points lays heavily on the qualitative feedback and not so much, if at all, on quantitative scoring. The final summative assessment is high-stakes and takes into account all insights from the lower stakes (mainly intermediate stakes) data points for a holistic view of the student's abilities. Programmatic assessment is also characterised by an ongoing dialogue between the student and teacher, or coach, along the way. In order to successfully execute programmatic assessment, it is crucial that coaches at CO-IEMES have insight into the entire learning process of their students. Therefore, CO-IEMES has taken the initiative to employ a learning platform that makes the learning journey of a student more visible and trackable.

CO-IEMES found that platform in Portflow, the learning experience portfolio for holistic assessment and learner agency.

2. Meet Fontys



Brigit Kolen, MA

EDUCATIONAL INNOVATOR, EXPERT IN PROGRAMMATIC ASSESSMENT
AND CHALLENGE-BASED LEARNING, VLE COACH

Brigit Kolen was lecturer of Copywriting and Academic Competencies, and VLE Coach at the Academy for the Creative Economy (Fontys). At CO-IEMES, she had taken the lead in implementing Portflow into the curriculum. After the summer of 2023, she started a new role within the Education Innovation team of Fontys' department of Education and Research. Brigit is a big ambassador of blended learning, and even released her own book back in 2019 (Coutinho): *"Impact op afstand"*, which is the Dutch translation for *"Impact at a distance. Online teaching in higher education"*. In her book, she dives deeper into online teaching strategies and best practices for higher education.

Fontys Academy for the Creative Economy (ACE)

Fontys University of Applied Sciences is an innovative higher education provider, with several institutes and campuses spread over the southern part of The Netherlands. Fontys provides education to over 44,000 students and offers a great variety of programmes at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Academy for the Creative Economy (ACE) is one of Fontys' institutes located in Tilburg. Their aim is to train creative professionals for the new economy. The CO-IEMES programme is realising this with *High Impact Learning*. Students have to work on 'wicked problems', which are authentic problems from real clients that students bring in themselves and which do not necessarily have a pre-made solution. Students can solve these with research and concept creation, for which it's important that their actions are context rich and reflect an environmental awareness.





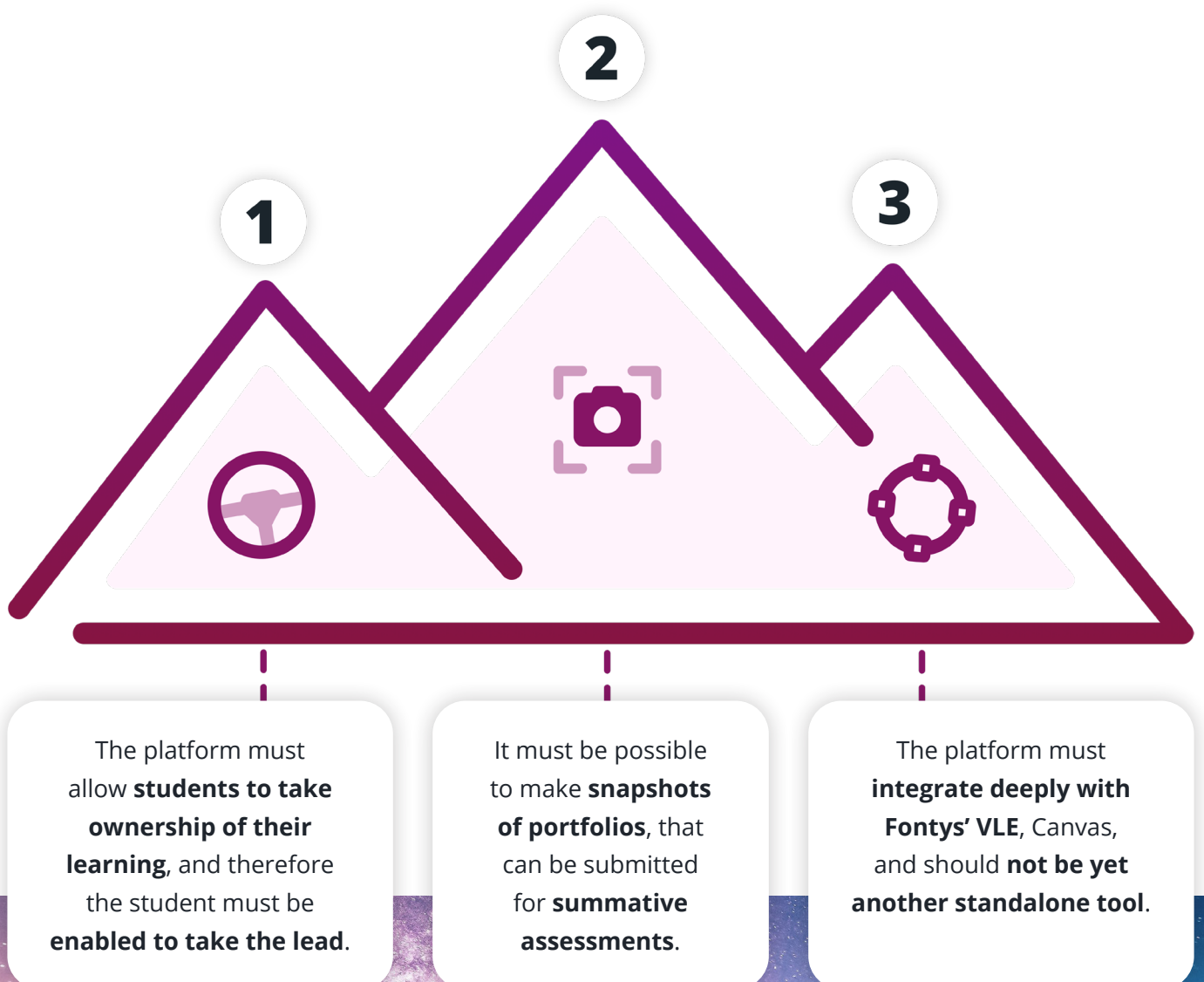
Brigit Kolen, MA

EDUCATIONAL INNOVATOR, EXPERT IN PROGRAMMATIC
ASSESSMENT AND CHALLENGE-BASED LEARNING, VLE COACH

“Student ownership has become visible very quickly because of Portflow. It all becomes much more trackable what a student is doing and what that learning journey looks like. That visibility is effortlessly seen in the growth and self-sufficiency of students.”

3. Challenge: Preparing Students for an Unpredictable Future

Fontys wants to train adaptive professionals that will be prepared for an unpredictable future, as stated in their strategic plan towards *talent-oriented education*. In their 5 principles of learning, Fontys has already positioned their students as the primary owner of their own learning, based on the self-determination theory. They envision a digital learning environment where students can control what, how and when they learn - a place where their students can not only manifest their autonomy, but also build on their sense of responsibility. Therefore, their education had to be designed accordingly. In line with this vision, Fontys was looking for a learning platform that would meet the following 3 requirements:



4. Timeline of Solution: Deploying Portflow for Holistic Assessment and Learner Agency



Spring 2021

Fontys' search has led them to Portflow, the learning experience portfolio for holistic assessment and learner agency, to build the skill-set for career-ready professionals. Portflow prepares students for lifelong learning by appealing more to their intrinsic learning motivation and by centralising the development of programme-level outcomes and competencies.



Summer 2021

CO-IEMES started a pilot for Portflow with a couple of their students and several coaches who wanted to take on the challenge. It was concluded that the pilot had been a very successful project for CO-IEMES because it provided them with a lot of valuable information and answers. After the pilot, CO-IEMES made the decision to start using Portflow for their courses. Crucial factors in their decision were Portflow's ability to provide insight into learning that occurs non-linear, the stress for students and assessment peak for teachers that Portflow takes away towards the end of the semester, and most importantly that it fitted into their pedagogical vision.



September 2021

Portflow was rolled out for CO-IEMES's undergraduate students in their final year.

September 2022

Roll-out of Portflow for students in their propaedeutic semester of the CO-CCC (Creative Concepts for Communication) programme, the new name of CO-IEMES.



February 2023

In this last phase, Portflow was completely rolled out to all CO-IEMES's undergraduate students, effectively serving all students by now



This timeline showcases the way CO-IEMES, and many other Fontys programmes alike, adopted a gradual strategy to implement the concept of programmatic assessment or other forms of holistic assessment.



5. Results: Key Benefits Delivered by Portflow

1



The ability to track a student's learning journey and personal growth

Portflow has provided CO-IEMES with an ePortfolio solution to implement programmatic assessment at their institute. Along their personal learning journey, students take ownership of their work by collecting evidence from their experiences and linking them to the outcomes and skills required for becoming adaptive professionals. In that way, Portflow did not only serve as a nice collection of evidence or artefacts of learning results, but also made the learning journey of a student visible and trackable. Students and other stakeholders of their learning journey can actually monitor their development towards their goals (competencies, skills, outcomes) across all learning contexts (projects, courses, etc.). This allows the students to see what their own growth has been over their learning journey. It also allows the teachers and coaches to easily get rich and dynamic insights into a student's learning process because with Portflow they are not required to linearly go through a process that per definition didn't occur linearly.

“Tracking the learning process becomes very clear with version management, feedback and progress reviews in Portflow.”

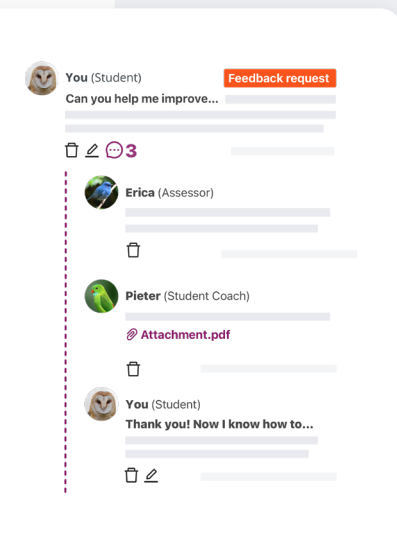
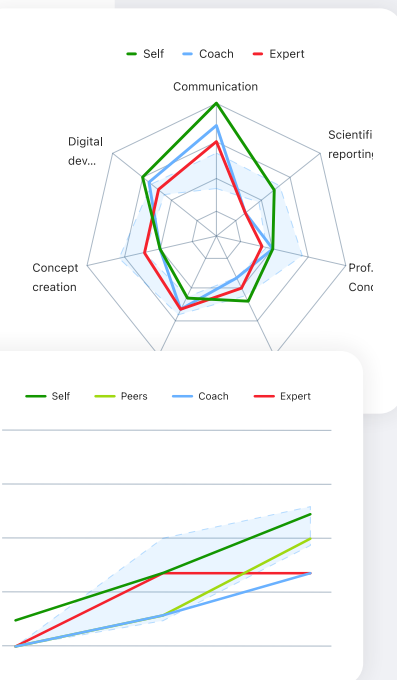
2



Better streamlined feedback

In Portflow, there is a feedback request feature that allows students to take ownership of their work by asking for feedback from peers, coaches, and also external reviewers and involved parties. The feedback provided on a student's work remains visible in Portflow, no matter where a student places their work in their portfolio. This has made it much easier for the teachers and coaches to see whether a student's work has received feedback and whether the feedback loop is closed or not. A closed feedback loop means that the feedback has provided enough information to stop the dialogue on this particular product. If this is not the case, the feedback loop will be opened up again, and the dialogue between student and teacher/coach will continue.

“Portflow makes it much easier to see whether a student's work has received feedback, the feedback loop is closed, the student has proven their competency level, or whether there are still products where this is not the case.”



3

Students are empowered to learn in a way that suits them

Because Portflow is a non-linear learning platform, it allows students to work in a way that matches their learning preference the best. With Portflow, students at CO-IEMES are empowered to decide for themselves what evidence they create, how they structure their portfolios, when and whom to request feedback from, and what they eventually submit within the VLE that proves their achievements. This results in an inclusive learning experience for students.

“The idea of allowing students to work in a way that reflects their actual learning journey in the best way is empowered by Portflow.”

4

Embracing unpredictability with flexibility

In order to prepare students for real-world challenges, learning activities in the curricula needed to be relevant and personalised. In addition, by giving their students (scaffolded) control over their own learning activities and processes, CO-IEMES recognised that this would yield a certain amount of unpredictability in the resulting learning processes and activities. CO-IEMES quickly identified students as change agents and one of the most flexible stakeholders in their organisation. Portflow enabled CO-IEMES to fully embrace this unpredictability with flexibility in a platform that allows users to share, document and interact on developmental progress with any given learning flow.

“Once a student starts working, then they also do not have a boss to tell them exactly what to do. In fact, they will have a boss and colleagues that think along with them, and it’s unlikely that they are told exactly what they need to do. We also try to encourage this self-reliance during our education”



5



Lower workload and stress towards the end of the semester for students and teachers

Prior to discovering Portflow, students at CO-IEMES used to make their portfolios in Microsoft Teams. At the end of each semester, students made linear PDF documents based on their working documents gathered throughout the year, including the feedback they received on those documents. This not only resulted in extremely large PDF documents, but also an increased workload for students, as well as an assessment peak for teachers towards the end of the semester. Moreover, the previous solution offered no way to link the learning experiences in a consistent and clear way to learning outcomes and the skills they needed as adaptive professionals. With Portflow, students at CO-IEMES don't have to create an entire portfolio at the end of the semester anymore because they already created it throughout the course, collecting and linking all their self-directed learning experiences to the outcomes and skills along the way. This has decreased the exam stress and pressure towards submission deadlines for students at CO-IEMES, which lines up perfectly with the concept of programmatic assessment: by learning continuously, the need for a traditional summative test at the end of a learning period is no longer necessary. Besides this, Portflow has allowed teachers at CO-IEMES to go through the portfolio in their own way, speeding up the assessment process for them.

“The exam stress that you want to take away with programmatic assessment has, thanks to Portflow, indeed decreased for our students.”

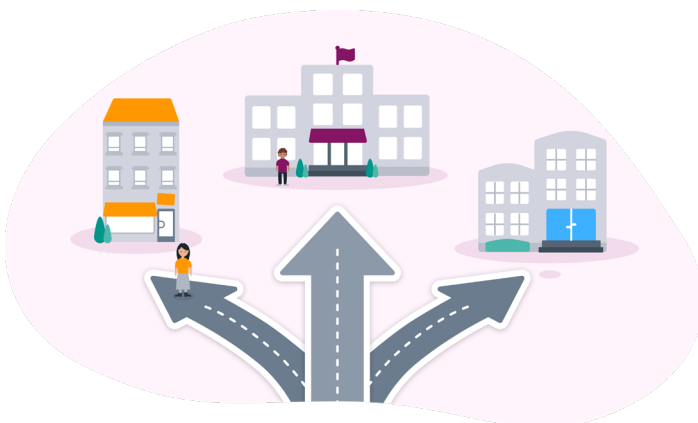


6. Operationalisation: Modern Programmatic Assessment with Student Agency – a Strong Combination with Challenge-Based Learning

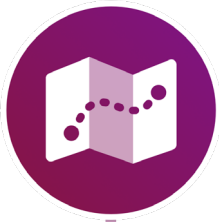
Educational organisation

CO-IEMES observed a few years prior to the adoption of programmatic assessment that after their first year, when their students went into the theoretical phase, students felt they missed the link with practice. The relevance of what they were doing was missing in their perception, causing them to drop out. That is why they introduced Challenge-Based Learning around 2018. This meant that there would be no pre-structured educational offerings, but instead the educational offerings would be completely demand-driven: students indicate what they need and receive plenty of guidance from their coaches. Students find their own projects (practical cases) and work on their learning outcomes and competencies. To make this feasible, CO-IEMES also consolidated the existing learning outcome structure into a manageable number (6).

The student population is organised into communities of 60 students with 7 coaches each. The coaches provide guidance on both process and content. They are spread over four half-days and three coaches are always present. Thanks to the overlap in presence, good transfer, intervision and visibility are guaranteed. Towards the graduation phase, the coaches guide the students towards increasingly self-regulation and self-direction.



Methodology: Holistic/Programmatic Assessment at CO-IEMES



Plan

Based on the programme-level framework of competencies, students choose a project to work on. At the start of projects and the creation of a plan, feedback is already exchanged to ensure that the chosen project and approach is in line with the intended level and appropriate complexity. In addition, tips are often solicited on how to approach the project.



Learn

Students compile their portfolio with supporting documents (professional products, activities, demonstrations, etc.) arranged by project they have worked on as collections. Students then link the evidence to the goals that have been defined as learning outcomes through the template. On these, they seek 360° feedback from experts, peers, clients, teachers, and coaches. Feedback is exchanged continuously, also while working on products. Both synchronously in dialogue and asynchronously as written feedback in the portfolio. In this process, synchronous feedback received is often documented by the student in the portfolio and validated by the feedback provider. We have also agreed on how we formulate the feedback: in a balance between feedback on process and growth, and feedback on their level. In doing so, we give the student the necessary guidance to know what they can improve and where they stand against the expected level. The combination of evidence and feedback forms the data points in the portfolio, and students are free to decide on the quantity.





Track

The way the data points are set up is very flexible. There are only 2 mandatory data points that every student must include in the portfolio: a midterm review and a self-reflection/self-assessment based on **VRATQQ criteria**.

- **Variation:** different types of products and contexts in which the student has worked on evidence and learning outcomes;
- **Relevance:** all evidence is relevant and can be linked to the learning outcomes and competencies;
- **Authenticity:** the evidence is genuine, reliable and original - i.e. no fraud has been committed;
- **Topicality:** the evidence is up-to-date and relates to the current period;
- **Quality:** the evidence is of sufficient quality to serve as convincing proof of competence. Quality can be demonstrated by validation through 360° feedback;
- **Quantity:** there is enough evidence to substantiate the abilities and mastery of the student.

From the perspective of a learning outcome or competency, it is easy to see which pieces of evidence are linked to it, how many there are, what the distribution is among the different types and which projects (collections) they are linked to. Moreover, it is also possible to see how long and when a student worked on a learning outcome through the timeline showing all activities on that learning outcome. The insights from the progress reviews (including the spider web in which the rating per role is broken down on the learning outcomes) provide a rich input for coaching conversations.



Prove

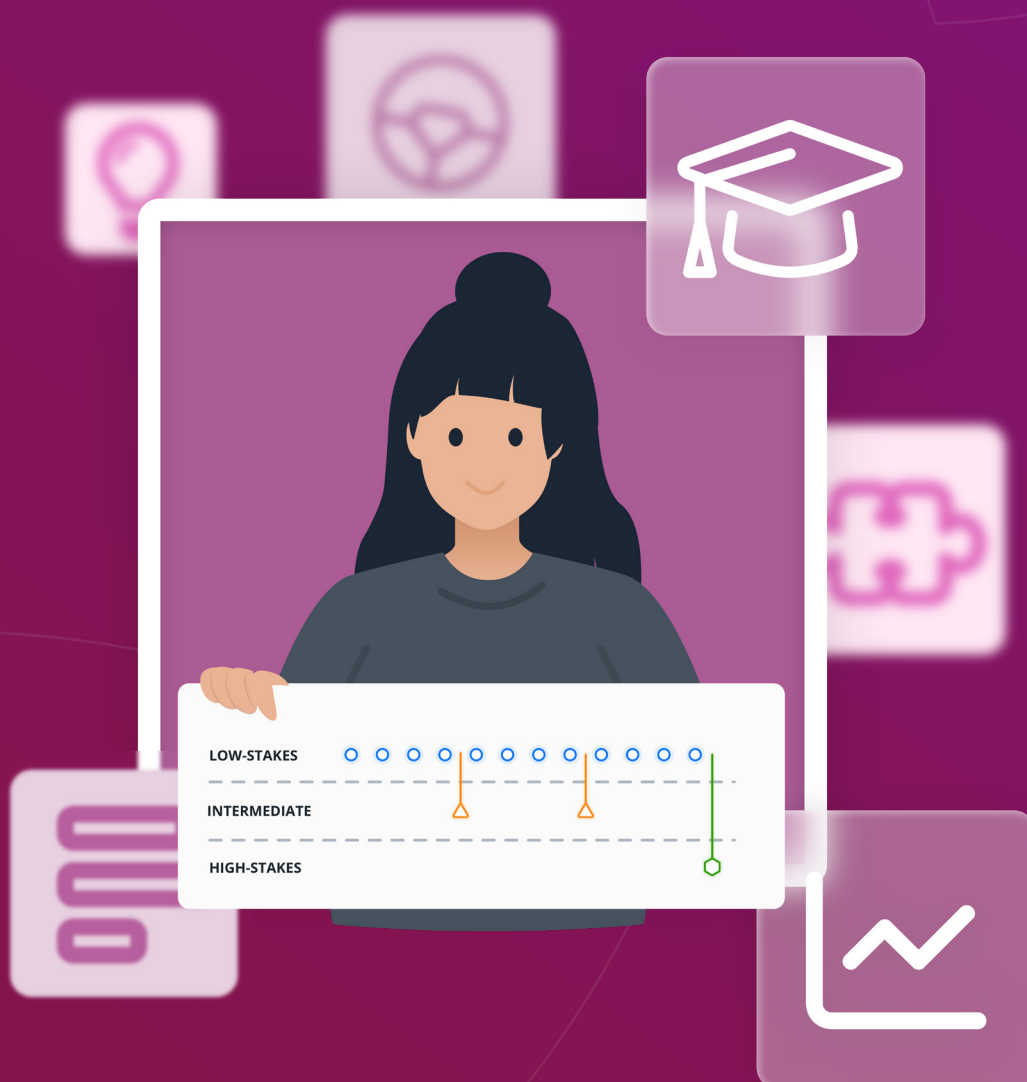
At the end of each semester, students submit a snapshot of their portfolio for summative assessment and decision. This includes consideration of the VRATQQ criteria and the student's own role in the whole process. Because programmatic assessment is used, the process of valuing all those data points has already been an ongoing process. This also means that the awarding of credits (depending on the summative assessment) can no longer be a surprise and has become a mere formality.



7. Conclusion

Over the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, CO-IEMES & CO-CCC and other Fontys programmes continued to grow their use of Portflow for portfolio-based learning and holistic assessment. Portflow has helped Fontys to make the learning journey of their students very visible and trackable, and has also improved the growth and self-directedness of their students. In addition, Portflow has provided staff (i.e., teachers and coaches) with very tangible insights into how to strengthen their didactics.

Besides the fact that Portflow increases the visibility and traceability of students' learning journeys, it also increases the ownership of students over their learning process and promotes lifelong learning. This way, Portflow also helps CO-IEMES with preparing their students to become those adaptive professionals that are capable of taking responsibility for their own learning, which they want to deliver to society.



8. Future Direction

CO-IEMES / CO-CCC will be expanding the use of Portflow to students at internships, as Portflow offers a feature that allows external reviewers (e.g. internship supervisors) to access the portfolio on invitation by the student, to streamline the 360-degree feedback process. As attention increases at Fontys on lifelong and responsible learning, holistic assessment, and ways of assessment that give a much more honest picture of the knowledge and skills of a student instead of a snapshot, Brigit is excited to see how Portflow can support other institutes within Fontys. Because there are many more scenarios in which portfolio-based learning can add value for education than just programmatic assessment, Brigit also sees a lot of potential in further harnessing the self assessment feature of Portflow. This feature allows students to see a spider diagram that is created after a student has evaluated himself on data from the portfolio. This would help to literally let the student visualise: *"Where am I now? And what do I still have to do?"*.

Simultaneously, other Fontys undergraduate and postgraduate programmes have been rolling out Portflow for their talent-oriented education reform. They continue their efforts in delivering education that fosters student agency with various forms of holistic assessment. Meanwhile, they shape the future of Portflow together with Drieam and other partners in higher education in co-creation.



Holistic Assessment (Programmatic Assessment) with Student Agency: a Strong Combination with Challenge-Based Learning at Fontys University of Applied Sciences.

Competency-Based / Skill-Centric

Portflow places the students' competency and outcomes development at the forefront of their educational journey.

Empowering Learner Agency

Portflow fosters the student's ownership of their own learning as preparation for being self-directed and responsible learners.

In Synergy with your VLE

Portflow lives entirely within the trusted environment of your VLE, leveraging and extending its power; *LTI Advantage Certified*.

Rich Scaffolding Toolbox

Portflow allows you to employ a wide range of scaffolds, matching the context and student's needs, offering full flexibility.



Foster Career-Readiness with Holistic Assessment *and* Learner Agency

Learn all about Portflow, follow a feature tour, or book a free online demo for you and your colleagues by scanning the QR code or visiting the website.

