

RUN LEARNING AND TEACHING AWARDS 2025

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Title: The Use of Virtual Client Simulations in Psychology Learning and Teaching

Abstract: University assessment faces key challenges. Students demand accessible and engaging experiences, and authentic assessment that ensures career-readiness. Educators must also safeguard their assessment from the threats of generative AI.

We leveraged speech-to-text AI and virtual avatar software to build a Virtual Client Simulation (VCS). Within an undergraduate psychology subject, the VCS provided visual and auditory accessibility, while subtitles maintained text-based accessibility. The VCS positioned students as practitioners, making in situ client decisions. The video format safeguarded academic integrity.

The VCS animated an otherwise routine assessment: an online multiple-choice test. Test items were vivified via short videos depicting the virtual client as an employee presenting for a psychological evaluation. The client's comments and questions targeted examinable content. Students selected their responses from multiple-choice options throughout the VCS.

Post-assessment feedback confirmed the VCS as highly usable, accessible, and engaging. Most students reported that it had helped them learn, and students appreciated the opportunity to engage with a (virtual) client in a (simulated) work environment.

The VCS adapts to summative and formative assessment and scales-up in complexity to support postgraduate psychology training. It can also be deployed across the human and care services sectors.