

TITLE: Re-imagining remote assessments for a digital world. A speculative approach.

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic catalyzed a shift to complete distance education. While this demonstrated the feasibility of remote assessments, it also highlighted concerns about cheating and preserving the value of diplomas. With the emergence of AI tools like ChatGPT, these concerns grew.

Many universities chose to revert to on-campus examinations or turned to online proctoring. However, neither solution is fully satisfying from a pedagogical perspective, constraining what is being evaluated, introducing mistrust in the educational relationship, and supporting a surveillance culture, amongst other consequences.

Our approach was to re-imagine what quality remote assessments could look like, based on higher education values and principles. Rather than accepting the solutionism of ed tech companies, or returning to pen and paper, this research aims at opening the range of possibles and considering them critically. Traditional research methods do not work when thinking about the future (Biesta, 2010), we therefore took a speculative approach, based on Ross (2023) four step framework:

1. A speculative question: what would characterise quality remote assessments in an ideal world?
2. An object to think with: Following a discussion around cheating and academic integrity, we used three scenarios to imagine assessments of the future, considering the points of view of online students, teaching teams, and an ed tech rich university. Speculative design was then used to develop prototypes.
3. An audience to engage with: 34 members of the academic community (experts in assessment, speculative research methods, and AI, but also teachers and students from different fields, university leaders and instructional designers) from 10 institutions across 4 countries worked together in a two-day workshop at the end of May 2023.
4. Capture and analyse the design decisions and responses to the object: the discussions and prototypes were recorded and analysed using a thematic iterative approach.

The results highlight the importance of designing assessment to support autonomous motivation. Instructional design has often counted on the extrinsic motivators of rewards (often marks) and punishment (such as failing a course). The speculative approach suggested paying attention to creating meaningful assessment, supporting autonomy and reducing stress by supporting a feeling of competence. These can be understood using the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which offers a well-researched and strong theoretical framework that can help design quality remote assessments for a digital world.