UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

# SPEAKING WITHOUT FEAR: EMBEDDING VR INTO ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT IN POLITICS

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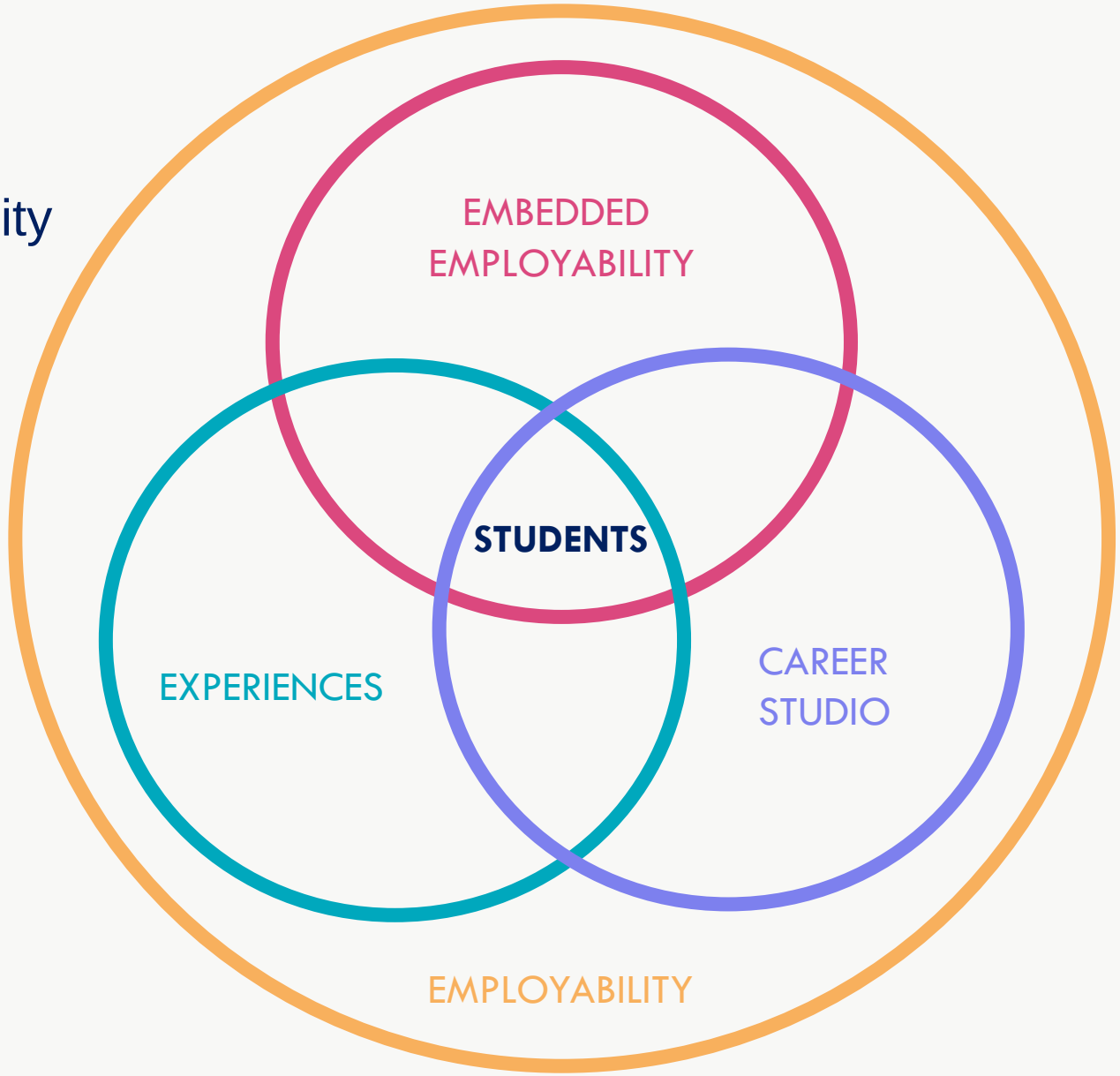
# INTRODUCTION

Our mission is to ensure that employability is deeply rooted into the student experience

- Career education is embedded into learning, teaching and assessment
- Complemented by high-profile and engaging activities and events
- Underpinned by one-to-one individualised support from peer Career Coaches



# POLI103: ‘STUDYING POLITICS SUCCESSFULLY’

- Compulsory academic skills and methods module for first-year Politics undergraduates
- Cohort of approximately 300 students each year
- Equips students with the skills needed to succeed in their politics degree and beyond
- Critical thinking, public speaking, research, academic writing, time-management, creativity, digital fluency, motivation
- Balance of assessment: 70% examination, 20% practical, 10% practical

# CONTEXT

- Public speaking is widely recognised as one of the foundational skills required in the future world of work (Dondi et al., 2021)
- Public speaking is an intimidating experience for most people (Furmark et al., 1999)
- More than 80% of students reported that delivering presentations were associated with social anxiety (Russell and Topham, 2012)
- Only 46% of European graduates feel confident in their ability to communicate effectively in-person (Handshake, 2025)
- Less than a third possess the confidence to communicate feedback to their peers (Handshake, 2025)

# TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED PEDAGOGY

- Utilises virtual reality (VR) technology to create an immersive learning experience in a simulated environment (Radianti et al., 2020)
- Situates learners in context-rich scenarios mirroring real-world environments (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
- Personalised AI-driven feedback acts as scaffolding for the learner (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Learners undertake practical tasks, engage in independent reflection, conceptualise improvements, and apply learning iteratively (Kolb, 1984)
- VR reduces performance anxiety and fosters experimentation in a risk-free environment (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018)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# IMPACT – QUANTITATIVE DATA

**Based on 200 pre-activity and 219 post-activity responses (2024/25):**

- 58% had not used VR before
- Half of respondents (49%) felt confident in their public speaking skills, increasing to 64% post-activity
- Students reporting low confidence decreased from 25% to 13%
- 75% agreed that the experience equipped them with the necessary techniques for effective public speaking
- 89% reported that VR had enriched their learning experience

# IMPACT – QUALITATIVE DATA

- Non-judgemental virtual environment provided a safe space for public speaking practice
- Challenge oneself without facing the anxiety level associated with a real audience
- Ability to replay recordings and observe their own body language
- One-to-one training with targeted insights on areas for improvement
- Innovative, highly engaging and immersive experience

# STUDENT REFLECTIONS

*“To be honest, I had little faith in myself before this semester, so this was a huge milestone for me.”*

*“One of my biggest fears was sharing my work or thoughts in a seminar…”*

*“… to be in a position [now] where I am sharing my research and ideas to the entire class is such an achievement for me.”*

# TRANSFERABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

- Following the 2023/24 pilot, the assessment was developed into a broader ‘Public Speaking Ladder’
- Significant interest from other departments within the Faculty and beyond (e.g., core skills modules)
- Considerable scope and variability across subject disciplines:

**Law**

**Archaeology**

**Communications and Media**

# SUMMARY

- Whilst common in healthcare and aviation, VR-based skills training is transferable to other disciplines
- Engaging in public speaking practice through virtual reality (VR) does not replace addressing a live audience
- Offers a valuable intermediate step for developing both skills and confidence in a non-judgemental, low-stakes environment
- Positive impact is evident among both the most confident and the least confident students
- Beyond VR, please consider how existing technology, software licences, and institutional expertise can be effectively utilised to support students and overcome challenges

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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST


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