

Virtual Reading Rooms and Virtual Teaching Spaces Survey

Research Libraries UK, working with a number of our national and international partners, is re-issuing its major survey, first conducted in May-June 2021, regarding the development and delivery of Virtual Reading Room and Virtual Teaching Space services. The aim is to document the most recent developments and innovations in the area by the RLUK and broader national and international research library communities.

We welcome submissions from institutions from around the world and you do not need to be an RLUK member to complete this survey. You also don't need to have completed any previous surveys associated with this work.

What is the context for this survey?

Many collection-holding institutions have been actively exploring new and innovative ways through which digital access can be provided to their collections. This need has been enhanced by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The closure of libraries, archives, and museums to researchers during the height of the pandemic, restricted access during successive periods of national lockdown, and on-going social distancing rules, have significantly disrupted the ability of scholars to conduct research. The impact of this has been most acutely felt by postgraduates, and those undertaking time-limited studies.

This disruption is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, associated with the potential arrival of successive waves of infection around the globe, ongoing and periodic restrictions in international travel, and due to the reduction in research budgets (as many institutions implement tighter financial controls). The seriousness of the climate emergency will also question the viability and ethical basis of international travel. These factors combined mean that we need, as a community, to collectively consider alternative means of collection access through which original research can be conducted.

In response to these challenges, research libraries have been experimenting with the provision of geographically remote digital access to heritage and cultural collections through the creation of Virtual Reading Rooms (VRRs) and Virtual Teaching Spaces (VTSSs).

What do we mean by Virtual Reading Room and Virtual Teaching Spaces?

This survey asks a series of questions about the development and use of Virtual Reading Rooms (VRRs) and Virtual Teaching Spaces (VTSSs).

VRRs and VTSSs provide human-mediated remote digital access to collections which do not depend on digitisation. Through the use of live streaming via hi-res visualisers positioned within physical research spaces, scholars, teachers or members of the public can view and digitally engage with an institution's heritage and cultural collections, asking for these to

be positioned and repositioned by a member of staff, to enable their research. These are emerging and bespoke services which provide another means of user-responsive access to collection materials.

The results of this survey will inform an ongoing piece of research being undertaken by RLUK regarding the potential of virtual reading rooms as digital research infrastructure and the possibilities and benefits of undertaking a networked approach.

The results of this survey will be published by RLUK and made available to the community. It will complement the report 'New Frontiers of Digital Access: The development and delivery of Virtual Reading Rooms and Virtual Teaching Spaces amongst collection-holding institutions' (<https://www.rluk.ac.uk/libraries-archives-and-museums-enable-new-forms-of-remote-access-in-response-to-covid-19-pandemic/>) published in July 2021 and a series of case studies on the development and delivery of Virtual Reading Rooms (VRRs) and Virtual Teaching Spaces (VTSs) (<https://www.rluk.ac.uk/vrr-case-studies/>).

PLEASE NOTE:

- WHO: Please only complete this survey if you or your institution have developed a Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space. If you intend to develop these services but haven't yet, please complete the shorter version of this survey at:

<https://forms.gle/T8BHvt2aNnMYidpr6>

- TIME: This survey consists of 11 sections, with a combination of tick box and qualitative answers. Depending on the length of response, this should take between 20-25 minutes to complete. A PDF of this survey is available on the RLUK website

(<https://www.rluk.ac.uk/vrr-and-vts-survey-stage2>) if colleagues wish to consider the survey questions in advance of completion. Please note that responses can only be made via completing this Google form.

- DECLARATION: In completing this survey, you agree for RLUK to retain your responses in support of this work and to share these results with its stakeholders and partners. The responses submitted to this survey will be held and managed in accordance with RLUK's Data Protection Policy with RLUK as the data controller.

Please see RLUK's Privacy Policy for further information (available here:

<https://www.rluk.ac.uk/privacy-notice/>).

- QUERIES: If you have any questions about this survey please contact:

christina.kamposiori@rluk.ac.uk or matthew.greenhall@rluk.ac.uk.

* Required

For an example of a Virtual Reading Room service, please see the below video for a demonstration from colleagues at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester (demonstrated during the RLUK 2021 conference)



http://youtube.com/watch?v=_TWKRRyrgV0

[v=_TWKRRyrgV0](http://youtube.com/watch?v=_TWKRRyrgV0)

About you

Please provide basic details of who you are and the institution you represent

1. Your name: *

2. Job title: *

3. Institution: *

4. Email address: *

5. Is your institution a member of? (Please select all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- Research Libraries UK (RLUK)
- Association of Research Libraries (ARL)
- CLIR's Digital Library Federation (CLIR DLF)
- OCLC Research Library Partnership (OCLC RLP)
- The National Archives' Higher Education Archives Programme (HEAP)
- University Museums Group or University Museums Group in Scotland (UMG or UMIS)
- LIBER (Association of European Research Libraries)
- CAUL (Consortium of Australian University Librarians)
- CARL (Canadian Association of Research Libraries)

Other: _____

6. Did you complete the previous RLUK SCLN survey regarding digital access to collections (January 2021)

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

7. Did your institution complete the previous RLUK survey on VRRs and VTSS, conducted in May-June 2021? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Your Virtual Reading
Room service

Please tell us about the development and delivery of your Virtual Reading Room service

8. Do you currently have a virtual reading room service within your institution? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No, but intend to launch one in the future

9. When was your service established? (or intended launch date)

Example: January 7, 2019

10. What was the purpose of its establishment?

Mark only one oval.

- To deliver remote reading room sessions in response to the pandemic
- As a delivery method for more digitized content
- As a means to give access to remote researchers for private study, scholarship or research
- Other: _____

11. Do you place access restrictions on who can use this service (e.g. researchers, students, general public)?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

12. If yes, please provide details

13. Who are the main audiences for your Virtual Reading Room service? Please tick all that apply

Check all that apply.

- Internal academics and researchers (staff)
- Internal students (postgraduates and undergraduates)
- External academics and researchers (staff)
- External students (postgraduates and undergraduates)
- Community groups and members of the public
- Businesses and consultants

Other: _____

14. Do you charge for your VRR service? Please select one.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- For some users (e.g. external academics or researchers)
- For some purposes (e.g. if required for extended periods)
- Other: _____

15. If you do charge for this service, please provide further details (e.g. how much, why, in what way, and for who).

16. How was the establishment of your VRR service funded or resourced?

Check all that apply.

- Internal funding from within the direct organisation (e.g. from library/ archive budget)
- Internal funding from within the parent institution (e.g. within the university)
- External research grant (library/ archive the recipient)
- Combination of internal and external funds

Other: _____

17. If internally funded, how receptive was the budget holder to providing funding for the development of these resources and were there particular elements of your request that had most traction?

18. Please explain if you were allocated additional funding for staff recruitment (temporary, permanent etc.) or secured staff capacity via secondments to support the development and delivery of your VRR services.

19. Are you costing your VRR or VTS service in research funding applications? If yes, how do you calculate the cost?

How is your Virtual Reading Room service used?

Please tell us how people are using your service

20. How many virtual reading room users are you able to accommodate simultaneously? (i.e. that are viewing different items)

Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- Other: _____

21. How long is the average user session?

Mark only one oval.

- > 30 minutes
- > 1 hour
- 1 hour +
- It varies greatly depending on user and use
- Other: _____

22. How many Virtual Reading Room users does your service accommodate in an average month? Is your capacity sufficient to meet this demand?

23. Roughly what proportion does this represent of your physical, onsite users, in normal times?

24. Since its launch, how many researchers has your VRR accommodated in total?

25. From what disciplines do these Virtual Reading Room users originate? Please tick all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- Arts
- Humanities (inc. historians)
- Digital humanities
- Social Sciences
- STEM subjects

Other: _____

26. What is the appetite for Virtual Reading Rooms from within the academic community? If current levels of interest have been limited by your capacity to deliver these services, what is needed to overcome these barriers?

27. Have you consulted with your academic and/or wider research community to determine the development and delivery of your Virtual Reading Room service? If so, how?

28. How do you evaluate the experience of users using your VRR service?

Check all that apply.

- Surveys
- Feedback forms
- Verbal feedback
- Comments through email/ chat functions etc.

Other: _____

29. How do you use the evaluation findings to improve your services?

30. For what reasons are researchers using your VRR service?

31. Are you training researchers in using the VRR technology kit to facilitate their own research or run their own teaching?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

32. If you replied yes to the above question or consider training researchers in the future, please provide more information.

33. What type of collections are most viewed through your Virtual Reading Room?
Please select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

Archives (e.g. manuscripts and folios)

Special Collections (e.g. rare books)

Artefacts and objects (e.g. 3d Museum collections)

Art works

Other: _____

34. Do you place restrictions on the type of material that can be accessed via the VRR?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

35. If you do place restrictions on the type of material accessible via the VRR, what are the reasons for this? (e.g. uncatalogued material, material with data protection or copyright restrictions, large and unwieldy items).

36. Do you ask users to sign declarations (copyright, DPA, etc.) to use your VRR service?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

37. Are VRR users allowed to take screenshots during the delivery of the service?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

38. Please provide more information about the process of asking users to sign declarations to use your institution's VRR service and your approach to allowing users to take screenshots.

39. Do you perceive the delivery of Virtual Reading Room services changing the role of special collections, archives, or museum staff in the research process?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Too early to tell

40. If you think VRRs will change the role of staff in the research process, how?

41. Is further information available online regarding your Virtual Reading Room service? If so, please provide a link:

Your Virtual Teaching
Space services

Please tell us about the development and delivery of your Virtual Teaching Space service.

42. Do you currently have a Virtual Teaching Space service within your institution? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No, but intend to launch one in the future

43. If yes, when was it established? If no, when will it be launched?

_____ *Example: January 7, 2019*

44. Is your Virtual Teaching Space service distinct and separate from your Virtual Reading Room service? Are these services related/co-located?

45. Do you charge for your VTS service? Please select one.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- For some users (e.g. external groups)
- For some purposes (e.g. if required for extended periods)
- Other: _____

46. How many virtual teaching sessions are you offering in the average month via this service?

47. Which academic disciplines are the most frequent or significant users of Virtual Teaching Space services?

Check all that apply.

- Arts
- Humanities (inc. historians)
- Digital humanities
- Social Sciences
- STEM subjects

Other: _____

48. Are Virtual Teaching Spaces being integrated into curriculum design (setting up core learning activities, assessments)?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Too early to say
- In some subjects/disciplines

Other: _____

49. What potential do you see for impact on the academic curriculum through enhanced digital access to collections via Virtual Teaching Spaces? (For example, larger cohorts, at an earlier stage in the curriculum, or across a wider range of subjects).

50. To what extent is this service being used by groups outside of your institution (e.g. school and community groups). What is the nature of their use of the VTS service?

51. Is further information available online regarding your Virtual Teaching Space service? If so, please provide a link:

How do you do it?

Please tell us about the practical considerations of creating and delivering your virtual reading room and virtual teaching space services

52. Which of the following do you use to deliver your VRR and VTS services?

Check all that apply.

- Fixed visualisers (permanently located and fixed to a wall, ceiling or surface)
- Static visualisers (designed to be used within a fixed location on a semi-permanent basis)
- Mobile visualisers (designed to be moved to the point of use)
- Camcorders and cameras
- Audio mixer
- Video mixer
- Mobile and adjustable lighting
- Digitisation kit to improve ability to digitise collections on demand
- Dedicated and named staff who are responsible for your VRR and VTS services
- Funding to appoint staff to digitise targeted collections

Other: _____

53. Were any of these specially purchased to enable VRR or VTS services?

54. What do you use to establish a connection with your Virtual Reading Room user?

Check all that apply.

- Zoom
- MS Teams
- CiscoWebex
- Bespoke and specifically designed platform

Other: _____

55. Does the use of visualisers differ between your Virtual Reading Room and Virtual Teaching Space services?

How does your VRR relate to other forms of digital access?

56. Do you offer a "digitisation on demand" service for archives and special collections? (at the request of individual users)

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

57. Do you undertake "opportunistic" digitisation of items consulted within your Virtual Reading Room? (i.e. take advantage of an item being produced for a VRR consultation to digitise it at the same time)

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Sometimes

58. If you have a digitisation strategy, has this been revised / will it be revised in light of the last 12 months of activity?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Maybe
 Other: _____

59. Have the delivery of virtual reading room and teaching services changed your digitisation and/ or cataloguing priorities and how? Have they increased your digitisation activities?

60. Would you be willing to share your approach to digital content creation and how it relates to your VRR service through:

Mark only one oval.

- An event, workshop or seminar
- A written case study
- A video case study
- Sharing any revised strategies
- No, not yet
- Other: _____

Spaces used for Virtual Reading and Virtual Teaching services

Please tell us about the design and development of the physical spaces in which your VRR or VTS sits

61. Where is your Virtual Reading Room located?

Mark only one oval.

- Situated within our existing reading room
- Within a dedicated space, specifically designed for this use
- Within a repurposed space within the library, archive, or museum
- In the same space as our Virtual Teaching Space
- At multiple locations as required (using mobile visualisers)
- Other: _____

62. What was the rationale for choosing this location, for your Virtual Reading Room? (please select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- Adjacency to collection store
- Adjacency to research centres or departments (key users)
- Availability of space - this was an appropriate available space
- Availability of services required (e.g. power sockets)
- Good wifi/internet coverage in area
- Adaptability of space (e.g. tables/lighting could be repositioned)
- Security
- Good acoustics
- Good lighting
- Good thermal controls

Other: _____

63. Is this a permanent home for your VRR?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Undecided

64. Where is your Virtual Teaching Space located?

Mark only one oval.

- Situated within our existing teaching space / classroom
- Within a dedicated space, specifically designed for this use
- Within a repurposed space within the library, archive, or museum
- In the same location as our Virtual Reading Room
- At multiple locations as required (using mobile visualisers)
- Other: _____

65. What was the rationale for choosing this location, for your Virtual Teaching Space? (please select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- Adjacency to collection store
- Adjacency to research centres or departments (key users)
- Availability of space - this was an appropriate available space
- Availability of services required (e.g. power sockets)
- Good wifi/internet coverage in area
- Adaptability of space (e.g. tables/lighting could be repositioned)
- Security
- Good acoustics
- Good lighting
- Good thermal controls

Other: _____

66. Is this a permanent home for your VTS?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Undecided

67. What spatial issues have you encountered in establishing your virtual reading room or virtual teaching spaces?

68. How might Virtual Reading Rooms and Teaching Spaces be used alongside physical reading rooms/spaces if blended learning models were to be adopted within the sector going forward?

69. If applicable, please explain what has changed with the resumption of onsite services after the disruption caused by Covid-19.

70. Would you be willing to share images or plans of the location of your Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space with the community?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Staffing and skills

What are the staffing requirements to deliver your Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space service

71. Are particular roles/staff responsible for the delivery of VRR or VTS services within your institution (e.g. curatorial staff, reader services, education team)?

72. Please explain if you had to suspend or scale back other services (or planned activities) in order to divert staff time to this new service offer. If yes, to what extent do you think is this sustainable in the long-term?

73. What are the skills requirements / skills development needs of staff in supporting Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space services?

74. How are you meeting these skills needs amongst your staff? (Please select all those that apply)

Check all that apply.

- Informal training and skills sharing between colleagues
- Online tuition and guides
- Dedicated training sessions on the use of VRR and VTS services
- Knowledge sharing with other institutions

Other: _____

75. Beyond individual skills needs, do you have any comments on how staff roles are evolving for the delivery of digitisation, Virtual Reading Rooms and Virtual Teaching Spaces?

76. Would you be interested in participating in collaborative skills development programmes for staff around the development and use of VRRs and hybrid spaces, including internationally?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

77. Would you be willing to lead or deliver bespoke training around the development and use of VRRs to colleagues outside of your organisation?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

78. If yes, are there any particular topics around which you would be willing to share your expertise?

79. What are the skills requirements / skills development needs of researchers in using Virtual Reading Room services?

80. How have you established the skills requirements of academics or researchers using these services (please select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- Conversations with individual academics
- User surveys (of existing VRR users)
- User surveys (of potential VRR users)
- Feedback forms (after use of VRRs)

Other: _____

Opportunities for collaboration

What are the opportunities to collaborate around the development and delivery of Virtual Reading Rooms.

81. Would your institution be interested in joining a national or international network of virtual reading rooms, which enable a degree of compatibility and discovery with one another?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Maybe

82. In your opinion, what would be the benefits of a network or consortia of Virtual Reading Room services?

83. What are the barriers to consortia approaches to these virtual services and how can they be overcome?

84. In your opinion, what would underpin the success of a national or international network of virtual reading rooms? Please selected your TOP FIVE in terms of importance.

Check all that apply.

- Agreed technical standards and frameworks for VRRs
- National directory of VRR services (to support discovery)
- Agreed standards for outputs and application of IIRF
- An understanding on the integration of virtual reading rooms and physical reading rooms
- National funding programmes for VRRs
- Central booking system for VRRs
- Agreed standards for VRR interfaces
- Consortial approaches to training and skills development for VRR staff
- Inclusion of non-university or higher-education institutions within a network (e.g. public bodies, government institutions, local authorities))
- Agreed benchmarking of VRR services
- Case studies of best practice
- Joint promotion and marketing around VRRs and VTSs to target audiences, including non-users

Other: _____

85. Do you have any further comments or suggestions regarding networked approaches to Virtual Reading Rooms?

Final reflections

On the development and delivery of Virtual Reading Rooms and Virtual Teaching Spaces

86. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your experience of developing or delivering a Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space service?

87. What have you learnt about these technologies and services after more than a year of operating – and how will your approach change for the 2022/23 academic year?

88. What are the key things that would allow you to develop and sustain your Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space services?

Declaration

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Please see RLUK's Privacy Policy for further information (available here: <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/privacy-notice/>).

89. Can RLUK get in contact with you regarding your experiences of developing and delivering a Virtual Reading Room or Virtual Teaching Space service (e.g. to participate in future research)? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

90. Would you be willing to provide a case study regarding your experiences to be published on the RLUK website? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

91. Would you be happy for your institution to be cited in any research that comes from this survey? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

92. Would you be happy for RLUK to share these responses with its partners in connection to this research? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No