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## **EDITORIAL**

The theme of this issue was intended to be “sharing our collections with the world”. However, the pandemic compelled us to think again. Instead, we look at how libraries dealt with the pandemic. We think it would be helpful to document how libraries adapted in extraordinary circumstances – an account that might be of value to readers in the years to come.

This issue looks back at the challenging times that all libraries went through during lockdown. It was a time when our readers couldn't access physical collections but they still had essays to write and dissertations to submit. The librarians rose to the occasion and soon found ways of delivering services. As more services went online, resources were often reallocated for ebooks and Scan and Deliver services. Librarians played a vital role in supporting teaching and learning during lockdown.

**Robin James** reports on how the Scan and Deliver Service at the University Library (UL) took off at short notice. Before the end of 2021 they had dealt with an impressive 22,500 requests! **Angela Cutts** recounts how the Education Faculty Library provided for their users. They always had users with diverse needs – as some of them couldn't access physical libraries for most of the year. So the library already had systems in place to cater to their needs. **Vanessa Lacey** explains how cataloguing activities carried on in the UL and how cataloguers enabled the Click and Collect Plus Service, whereby readers could borrow some previously non-borrowable materials.

During lockdown readers missed access to not just physical collections, but to study spaces as well. This led to the setting up of virtual study rooms and they played a vital role in dealing with isolation and helped in fostering a sense of community. We have a couple of articles on virtual study rooms – **Hélène Fernandes** discusses her experience of running one in Modern & Medieval Languages and Linguistics (MMLL) Faculty and **Meghanne Flynn** talks about the Arts & Humanities- (A&H) wide study room. We also look beyond Cambridge. **Mary Kattuman** looks at how a couple of libraries in New England – the Boston Public Library and the Widener Library at Harvard coped with the pandemic.

## SCAN AND DELIVER

The theme for this issue of CULIB is running library services during the pandemic. In Scan and Deliver's case it should really be "designing, implementing and running library services during the pandemic!" This is an account of how the service came to be set up in the University Library.

As most of us will recall, the libraries closed on 20 March 2020. As the extent of the pandemic became evident, so did the challenge of making physical collections available once the initial lockdown was over. It was clear that when it reopened, the University Library (UL) would be operating with a skeleton staff, and equally clear that bringing readers safely into our spaces would be extremely challenging. Therefore, it was decided that a Scan and Deliver service should be created and should form one of the core services operational when staff were allowed back in to the UL.

I was a member of the new Collection Services Recovery Group which started meeting at the start of May 2020. My task within this group was to set up and lead a Task and Finish Group to meet remotely and design the service then oversee implementation. To ensure cross team thinking and with the intention to embed the service long term after recovery, the group was made up of staff from the main University Library (UL), Faculty and College Libraries, meeting via Teams, but all of whom had other roles, to which this work was added.

It was run on a Silver Team structure, with members encouraged to have their own bronze teams below to undertake and spread the workload, with the necessary design tasks divided between small groups. This Task and Finish Group met for the first time on 18 May. There simply wasn't time to buy in a third-party package for the LMS, so there were many areas to cover but principal among these were: agreeing a basic workflow, designing an online request process and a webform which linked to a request tracker system. Designing a checking mechanism and a fetching workflow, linking to the scanning phase with a secure and simple data storage and delivery

system, allied to adherence to copyright, good statistical gathering and problem solving. Simple.

There were a number of other factors, we had no idea how many requests the service would have to accommodate so we also had to decide on usage policies, which collections were in scope, potential capacity, and which and how many scanners would be needed. We were also considering the personnel issues such as who would run the service, how to ensure resilience in a workforce likely to be depleted due to illness.

The Task and Finish Group did a fantastic job and after only a month we were ready to start the implementation process. By necessity though, it was with a different group of staff unable to work from home, drawn from many departments, all working on site, so good communication between the two teams was essential. The first staff returned on 22 June, with a go live date of 1 July. Those in the building during this very hot summer will remember that there were many restrictions on the activity: strict signing in and out, two metre social distancing, strict one-way systems in place in both corridors and staircases with many areas of the Library closed to all, lots of hand sanitiser, strict occupancy levels, no fans, no catering of any kind and perhaps most strikingly - no readers.

Because the limitations on where we could operate safely were very strict, Scan and Deliver was set up in the main Reading Room corridors. Scanning stations with newly acquired scanners coupled with PCs taken from the LSF Ingest project were set up across both corridors to ensure staff could work safely with all windows and doors open. Over the next ten days each component of the process was thoroughly tested, refined and documented and once each was signed off we set about joining them together and testing end to end. The process was completed by drawing all the staff together and undertaking a full end to end process mapping exercise to ensure nothing had been missed and that everything was fully documented. This would enable the Faculty and Department Libraries to initiate and integrate their Scan and Deliver services easily and seamlessly once they returned to the workplace, which they have since done.

As planned, and to the great satisfaction of all involved, Scan and Deliver went live on 1 July 2020. Within a couple of weeks, we were receiving on average between 400-500 requests per week and expanding the team to accommodate this culminating in a peak of over 750 requests per week in January and February 2021 after the University instructed students not to return after the Christmas vacation. Thankfully, the pace of things has slowed somewhat as the Library and University have recovered, and students are in residence again.

Since the service went live it has had to cope with considerable change, particularly with respect to location. Having started in the Reading Room corridors, it was then relocated up to the Commonwealth Room. Then due to some substantial electrical work, we went to the Anderson and Aoi Reading Rooms and when they resumed services, from there into the West Room alongside Collection Logistics and the Library Storage Facility (LSF) Ingest which have also resumed.

In addition to those Faculty and Department Libraries (FDL) and college staff still providing the service, at the time of writing, the Scan and Deliver staff are currently a mixture of secondment and Collection Logistics staff supported by the team of fetchers but from that early planning stage to now, close to eighteen months later, approximately fifty staff, from across the UL, Faculties and Colleges have contributed to make the service the success it has been. It has demonstrated all that is good about Cambridge University Libraries and the college library network: excellent teamwork, personal resilience, good communication, dogged problem solving and a determination to deliver a superb service to our academic community.

During that period, it has fielded 22,500 requests from users and supplied them with over 50,000 pages of scans!

*Robin James*  
*Head of Collection Logistics and Services*  
*Cambridge University Library*

## **WHAT WE CHANGED - AND WHAT WE DIDN'T: EDUCATION LIBRARY SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC**

The Education Faculty Library has always catered for a diverse range of students. In addition to the familiar Undergraduate, Masters and PhD students, we support approximately 300 postgraduate Primary and Secondary teacher trainees, as well as Counselling and Educational Assessment students undertaking Practitioner Professional Development courses. We have a large community of part-time Masters and Doctoral students with many based off-site for much of the year. Each group have very specific individual needs and our experience in providing services for such an eclectic community turned out to be invaluable when the pandemic hit.

For several years, we have served two very distinct communities – those who can easily access our physical services and those who can't. Those who can't are often isolated, not only in physical terms being located away from Cambridge, but also in terms of their working patterns. Many of these students and trainees are working full or part-time, and we already had systems in place to ensure that they received equity of access to our resources and services. Therefore, when the pandemic struck, we had the great advantage of being able to draw on this work and extend our existing online services to our whole student and trainee body.

We always start the year by making sure that all our students are aware of the services we provide and how they can be accessed via the Library's Moodle site. We add information about our resources and services to course Moodle sites, we hold online and in person induction sessions, we engage via social media, we talk to our students at every opportunity, we email, we send Moodle announcements and we have strong relationships with academic staff, who always promote the Library to their students and trainees. We are very lucky. Our distance students tell us that they feel very connected.

We have links on our Moodle site to our many LibGuides (Literature Searching, Research Methods, Referencing), to our virtual and physical services and to our resources, which are heavily used by both students/trainees and Faculty academics and researchers. We have developed an Education Ebooks Collection of thousands of ebook titles and we constantly add to this collection, both with items that we ourselves purchase, but also additions from wider University acquisitions. The collection is divided into subject areas, much like the physical library, but with the advantage of each ebook being able to be linked from multiple sections. It is a primary source of material for both our distance and resident students, but over the last two years, use of the collection has increased hugely. Wherever possible we choose to buy material in ebook format, to ensure equity of access for all our students, trainees and staff wherever in the world they are based and whether there is a pandemic or not.

As well as building on our virtual Library services, we have created new resources to help our community find the materials they need despite Covid restrictions. In addition to implementing Click & Collect, Click & Connect Book a Virtual 1:1, Browse & Borrow and Study Space booking services, we have introduced our Finding Books and Articles walk-through, a virtual library assistant that guides the user through the various ways of searching and accessing University resources, which has proved especially useful for students who want instant answers outside UK time zone normal working hours.

The world has changed, and we are on a long and challenging journey, but due to our diverse user community and the foresight of our long-standing and experienced subject librarians here, we are very thankful that we already had systems in place to provide services to our online and distance community, and upon which we have continued to build.

*Angela Cutts*  
*Education Faculty Librarian*

## THE UL AT HOME : CATALOGUING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Like many other people, I stood in a library corridor in March 2020 watching our readers gathering heaps of books to take home, as it was announced the Library would close for a national lockdown. And I wondered: what on earth can cataloguers do at home if we can't come into the UL to see the books?

And also like many others, I found out there was quite a lot that could be done from home. Here's a few of the things UL cataloguers were doing during the various lockdowns:

### **Cataloguing from scans**

We started by scanning title pages of books before we left the UL for lockdown, but eventually we were allowed a staff member in the closed UL building to scan title pages which were then put on a shared drive for cataloguers to work on from home. Obviously a scanned title page (and reverse title page) doesn't give enough information to catalogue a book fully, so the person doing the scanning added essential information like the size of the book, then labelled the book. In this way we were able to keep a supply of books to the readers which could then be ordered and borrowed via Click & Collect.

The Library was still closed to readers at this point, but the UL set up Click & Collect Plus, where readers could borrow books that would normally have to be read in the Library. We used Request Tracker to enable readers to order books they'd like to borrow, the person in the UL checked the book wasn't rare or fragile and then made changes to the Alma system to allow the books to be borrowed via Click and Collect. This was quite popular, though we did have readers complaining they couldn't borrow rare books, one saying that obviously she would keep the rare books out of the kitchen!

### **Cataloguing from cards**

You may have noticed the card catalogue cabinets in the UL as you go into the South Courtyard. Perhaps you think they're just period furniture? Sadly not. There are an estimated 600,000 books catalogued on those cards, the



'secondary material' received between 1906 and 1976. All the first editions of Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming and of course children's authors like Enid Blyton. Some years ago the Tower Project catalogued 100,000 volumes and since then cataloguers have catalogued books by particular authors who were on a reading list, but lockdown provided an opportunity to do some more work on the card catalogue and another 50,000 cards were keyed and records upgraded.

We also took the opportunity to try keying catalogue data into Excel spreadsheets and using free software called MARCEdit to convert the data into brief catalogue records. This approach wouldn't be suitable for academic books but it proved very effective for cataloguing fiction. This meant that many more library staff could contribute data without having to use the Alma metadata editor. Staff who'd never expected to catalogue found themselves deciphering catalogue cards from the early 20th century!

All this, together with working on reading lists in Leganto and some work for the Office of Scholarly Communications, meant that we weren't short of things to do during lockdown. All the same, it was fantastic to get back in the Cataloguing Department for a short time in September 2020 (before the November lockdown), meet outdoors for a reunion lunch and of course to be surrounded by books again.

*Vanessa Lacey*  
*Head of English Cataloguing,*  
*University Library*

**TWO VIRTUAL STUDY ROOMS: THE MODERN & MEDIEVAL  
LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS (MMLL) LIBRARY EXPERIENCE  
AND THE SCHOOL OF ARTS & HUMANITIES (SAH) LIBRARIES  
ONE**

The libraries within the School of Arts and Humanities often work collaboratively to support teaching and learning within the school, as student learning often crosses over between the different faculties. With this in mind, discussions arose early in Lent 2021 of how libraries could support their individual users, as well as collaboratively support the students within the school. Multiple libraries developed versions of the Virtual Study Room during this time to supplement access to a physical space and community environment, with a digital workspace.

This article describes two of the study rooms developed during Lent Term 2021 to support students in the School of Arts & Humanities. The following contains practices and reflections from H  l  ne Fernandes, the Librarian of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics Library (MMLL), on the experience of a Faculty-specific service, and Megganne Flynn on the development of the Arts & Humanities (A&H) wide study room, and the carry-over to the virtual study rooms run at the English Faculty Library (EFL) in her role as a Senior Library Assistant.

## THE MML LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

The closure of the physical libraries during the COVID-related lockdowns deprived many students not only of a space to work, but also of the fellowship that comes from working alongside one another in the same space. In response, the MMLL Library started offering virtual study rooms to our students in January 2021 to foster a sense of community amongst our students. We didn't have any specific expectations in terms of attendance or student behaviour: our sole objective was to provide a space online where people could work together.

We initially trialled just one session a week and within a couple of months had increased our offer to three half-days a week (Tuesdays 10am-1pm, Thursdays and Fridays 1pm-5pm), in answer to student feedback about timings and frequency of sessions. Our MMLL sessions were complemented by the cooperatively run Arts & Humanities virtual study space taking place on Wednesday afternoons, which we also advertised in our weekly reminder email containing the permanent Zoom links.

I purposefully kept these weekly emails to students short and informal. They often included reminders of what libraries and library staff were still doing to support them while the physical space was closed, and periodically highlighted our growing wellbeing collection in print and electronic formats.

Crucially, they also stressed the informality of the arrangements: our only requirement was that attendees keep their microphones off. Aside from that, cameras could be on or off as they wished, and as their connectivity allowed. The MMLL Library staff member's camera was always on as a way of welcoming people in the virtual space and showing there was at least one visible human person working alongside them. The students did not need to book and could just drop in at any point during sessions, for however long they wished, depending on their commitments. They were free to introduce themselves in the chat or not, to interact with others or not. We also opted not to mandate breaks at set intervals to keep the experience as flexible as possible, although we did remind attendees of the importance of taking regular breaks. We aimed to replicate online the general atmosphere of the physical library as much as possible, and for them to be able to use this online space in whichever way suited them best.

I also ensured Directors of Studies were aware of this new service so they could point students to it - especially the students who were struggling with isolation and loneliness at the time.

Attendance was low at first while the service established itself (two to five students), but by mid-February we regularly had twelve to fourteen students taking part, ducking out when they had a lecture or supervision and often

coming back afterwards. Memorably, only one reader attended our very first session, but she was so keen to carry on working that our morning session overran by an hour and a half (i.e. until we were both really hungry)!

Afternoon sessions attracted higher numbers of students. The students who came ranged from first year undergraduates to MPhil and PhD students, although after the first few sessions we primarily welcomed undergraduates. Some became regulars, and gradually more people started to keep their cameras on. A few took advantage of the fact that they could see a librarian there to pop some questions about resources, asking us to order some ebooks for their studies, or for some help with a referencing query.

Attendance dropped dramatically in April 2021 once we were able to reopen the physical library space to our readers, as was to be expected: the virtual study spaces had been set up to fill one of the gaps left by the closure of the libraries, so it stands to reason that they would become less popular once the physical spaces reopened. Despite this, we carried on offering three sessions a week until the end of the academic year as advertised, mainly for the benefit of our Year Abroad students whom I had specifically included in my weekly messages: I knew several of them were having an incredibly difficult and lonely time abroad under strict COVID restrictions. A few had not even been able to leave the country as their placements had been cancelled due to the pandemic and were taking classes online from the UK. Being able to drop in during a virtual study room helped give them a sense of purpose and kept them connected to the Faculty.

The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive, both from the Directors of Studies who appreciated the additional support provided to our students at a time it was desperately needed, and more importantly from the students who, despite the relatively low attendance, were grateful for these sessions that were **“normalising [their] study experience, making [them] feel less lonely, and helping with focus and productivity.”** (First year MMLL undergraduate, February 2021).

During our two-term virtual study room trial, we were also contacted by other libraries who were keen to start a similar service for their own users, as well as one of our own Directors of Studies, who was suggesting the idea of virtual study rooms to their College Library Committee.

I estimate that around sixty different students attended at some point or another during these two terms – not all of them returning by any means – out of an MMLL student population of just over a thousand.

As for the value of offering such a service - was it time-effective? Was it cost-effective? In short - was it worth doing? And what would we do differently with the benefit of hindsight?

It was incredibly easy to set up as a service, as it simply required (a) the SAH Zoom licence to be available for the term on a recurring basis at the chosen times, (b) ensuring that a member of staff could be there to run it, ideally with a colleague as back-up in case of emergency or impromptu meeting, and (c) notifying the students of the recurring link to the session. The hardest part was deciding on the timing of the sessions to strike the right balance between the students' preferences, the availability of staff, and the availability of the licence – and, most important of all, what our team could realistically offer on a weekly basis.

One important lesson learnt early on was the usefulness of being able to call on someone else to co-host if you need to disappear temporarily for a meeting, or for anything else lasting longer than a few minutes, and want to keep the camera on. Failing this, it is possible to have a concurrent meeting on a separate platform with cameras off to save bandwidth, but it's far from ideal and doesn't always work. I did once have to run the virtual study room from my phone to attend another meeting also on Zoom on my computer... I would not recommend it.

It is also worth considering the impact of variable Internet connections, especially when running a virtual study room from home, as the disruption

caused by a dropped connexion can sometimes prevent students from logging back in once the virtual room is up and running again.

Our model of providing this online space with very few constraints meant that the impact on staff workload was negligible; staff carried out their own work while running the study room, unless they had another meeting scheduled. Personal preferences did come into play, however: not all members of my team of six enjoyed running a virtual study room, so the task of being available to run them often fell to the same people, which had direct workload and organisational implications. Similarly, this is not a format which all students will find comfortable or supportive. The findings from this trial show that, much like all services, they are not a universal silver bullet for staff and student engagement. It will not work for everyone, and considerations of staffing and culture at the individual libraries need to be considered when designing a service. What this service can offer is another tool to support library users, especially users who may not easily be able to come into the physical library, in addition to what libraries are already providing.

Interestingly, another model of online study rooms also sprung up around that time, with students organising their own peer-led online study groups alongside the library-run ones. These seemed better able to accommodate the individual needs of the students, while empowering their education in a way which the model run by libraries possibly didn't. The drawback of these student-led initiatives was the additional logistical burden it placed on the student organisers, putting greater pressure on them to ensure continuity than it did on library staff. However, a more student-led model may have greater positive impacts by fostering ownership and empowerment among its users. Ideally there could be space for a student-driven program in which librarians might provide administrative functionality to marry the best of these study room formats.

The significant drop in attendance once the libraries welcomed users back to their physical spaces led us to not reinstate the service for Michaelmas term 2021, partly due to the staffing and licence availability implications. The

overwhelming implication in the drop of attendance was that our students' need and desire for these had dropped now that there was a return to physical services and spaces.

At every part of this trial there was a discrepancy between what students said they wanted, and their actual use of the services provided. In my experience this can be common in student feedback; in this case, I suspect it indicates that our virtual study room may have acted as a kind of safety net for student well-being at a truly difficult time. It seemed that for some of our students, the comfort of knowing the service was there should they need to use it was enough, even if they chose not to attend. This tallies with the many messages of thanks from students about this service, many of whom never actually attended a session.

On reflection, were I to run this service again I would strengthen my evaluation and assessment methods throughout the trial with user experience tools to review it on a much more regular basis. This would ensure it truly answered our students' needs at every stage and would build in futureproofing of the service.

Our experience highlights that such a service can be extremely valuable when libraries are shut, when people are away from Cambridge, or can't attend the physical library due to illness or other personal reasons. Consultation with the Library Accessibility Service as well as with student focus groups would be worthwhile for any future development as an inclusive service which is available to all students. The initiative has great value, but ought to be properly resourced and planned to offer it longer-term in a sustainable way alongside all our other services.

*Hélène Fernandes*  
*MMLL Faculty Librarian*

## **THE SCHOOL OF ARTS & HUMANITIES LIBRARIES EXPERIENCE**

The subjects offered in the School of Arts & Humanities experienced several issues over the course of lockdown which had not been addressed by Cambridge previously. Students from these faculties often borrow papers from other Arts & Humanities courses, resulting in inter-disciplinary considerations in provided services and access to library resources.

Access to appropriate resources can be of particular concern for students across the Arts & Humanities. There are many electronic publishing restrictions on items on films and novels, which mean they may not be available in this region or on institutional licences. Additionally, in these disciplines the best materials for research are not necessarily the most recent publications, decreasing their likelihood of being available electronically. These are also disciplines in which the lack of access to people, whether lecturers, library staff, or even peers, particularly seemed to affect students in the Arts & Humanities, and stymie academic interpersonal learning.

During Lent Term 2021 the Arts & Humanities Library Managers Group developed a series of Virtual Study Rooms aimed at students across the Arts & Humanities Libraries (A&H) to try to give a sense of dedicated space and community in an online environment at a time when the physical library space was inaccessible. The development of this service arose from student requests for the community experience of not just academic-dedicated workspace, but the desire for developing relationships in an academic year where freshers had little -- if any -- casual interaction with their peers. The structure and implementation of these sessions tried to maintain that as the guidepost: creating a virtual study room which was sustainable for staff workload, as well as trying to foster a casual community environment for students similar to using a physical library space.



The first A&H Virtual Study Room was scheduled for Week 3 of Lent Term 2021, allowing for enough time for the various libraries to advertise to their students, but also to develop the initiative following the start of term meeting. The structure would involve a planned minimum of two library staff to “run” the study session, and would run on the A&H institutional Zoom license for 3.5 hours over the afternoon with a 30-minute break in the middle. Functionally, however, it needed to take into account that the schedules of the participating library staff were quite different, as the physical spaces had not yet re-opened and staff were on work-from-home or hybrid schedules. This all led to the developed structure of the calls, including the choice to schedule two members of staff from different libraries for each session to account for potential scheduling conflicts, and differences in internet connectivity. For practicality, one staff member would login using the institutional Zoom account and make the other team member a co-host. That way if any one host was suddenly dropped, or interrupted with other work, this would allow the study session to carry on uninterrupted.

The initial proposal was to share the workload and oversight across six A&H libraries (Art & Architecture, Philosophy, Divinity, English, Classics and MMLL). Initial slides were created involving pictures of the physical library space from some of the representative A&H libraries. These slides also involved the drafted rules for the session, with information on how they would run, which were suggested to be displayed during each session. The session rules enumerated that these were informal sessions in which the library staff would be there for encouragement and consultation but were not there to take attendance or do any formal teaching: students could come and go as suited their schedules within the timeframe. It was requested that microphones remain off, but cameras could suit the students. All attendees were encouraged to put their name, pronouns, degree, and study goals into the chat, including the library staff in attendance.

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## Arts & Humanities Libraries present: "working together" virtual study room

**Wednesday afternoons throughout  
Lent Term, starting on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb**

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Link: <https://lib-cam-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/95644271298?pwd=ZEJXN2lUWUlyM2pia2lxOUhYY0JjQT09>

*A&H slide example 1*

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## Welcome to the "working together" virtual study room

**Timings for this afternoon:**

Session 1: 1.15pm – 3pm

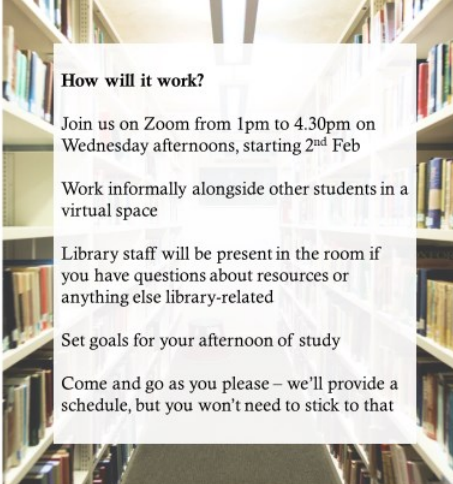
*followed by a break*

Session 2: 3.30pm – 4.30pm

This session is run by: name (library) and name (library)

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*A&H slide example 2*



**How will it work?**

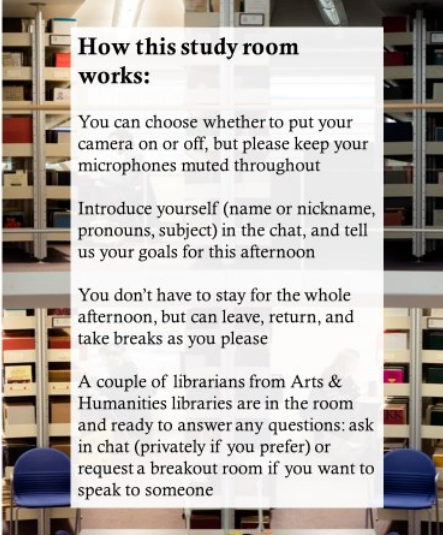
Join us on Zoom from 1pm to 4.30pm on Wednesday afternoons, starting 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb

Work informally alongside other students in a virtual space

Library staff will be present in the room if you have questions about resources or anything else library-related

Set goals for your afternoon of study

Come and go as you please – we'll provide a schedule, but you won't need to stick to that



**How this study room works:**

You can choose whether to put your camera on or off, but please keep your microphones muted throughout

Introduce yourself (name or nickname, pronouns, subject) in the chat, and tell us your goals for this afternoon

You don't have to stay for the whole afternoon, but can leave, return, and take breaks as you please

A couple of librarians from Arts & Humanities libraries are in the room and ready to answer any questions: ask in chat (privately if you prefer) or request a breakout room if you want to speak to someone

The initial slides were also used for advertisement, both on social media, as well as through Moodle announcements and distribution through Student Representatives in multiple faculties. (As a side note, this did lead to a good A&H managers discussion about cyber-security and not distributing active Zoom links on social media.) A good deal of planning went into trying to develop a framework that might be sustainable for both staff and students. During the development process a Library Assistant from the English Library (myself) was asked to participate in all of the sessions. While this decision was initially made for staffing purposes, in practice it appeared to allow for a continuity of service and culture from week to week.

While the service never reached the anticipated numbers based on demand (3-12 students per session), an observable culture did develop over the successive weeks. Students appeared to respond positively, if hesitantly to staff engagement and encouragement. The Zoom chat function allowed for staff to engage with students individually and as a group. When staff posted things like their own pronouns and work goals, and exchanged chatty messages, it set a pattern which allowed students to do the same. Students who came to one session were likely to return. Students who had been to multiple sessions were more likely to leave their cameras on after the first. Students who had been to two or more sessions were more likely to spontaneously post their own information, even if they entered a session after the start. In more than one session students studying in similar areas began engaging with each other's work, providing support and resources. This was particularly interesting to observe as it sometimes took place across subjects and degree levels in a way that would not tend to happen spontaneously in a physical environment.

The English Faculty Library continued with similar "Co-Working" sessions into Easter Term. While there was attendance in the early sessions, this significantly declined even from the numbers of the A&H sessions. This has been attributed to less interest in the service once physical library spaces were available again, however less advertisement of the sessions and the only weekly frequency should also be considered as contributing factors.



## How to Co-Work

- You are welcome to keep your cameras on or off
- Please keep your microphone off unless in a breakout room
- Introduce yourself to the chat with your name and what you are working on
- Use the chat to talk to each other or the librarians about what you're revising, and let us know if you would like to group up in a breakout room

## English Library Virtual Co-Working

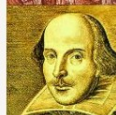
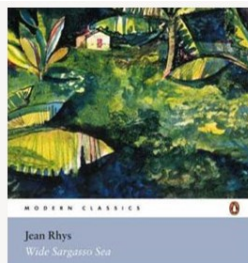
Thursday 1-2.45 and  
3.15-5  
with Person and Person

EFL slides example 1



## How to Co-Work

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- Use the chat to talk to each other or the librarians about what you're revising, and let us know if you would like to group up in a breakout room



EFL slides example 2

Throughout providing pandemic services it has been an understanding that one day staff and students may return to “normal” services, including the idea of returning to predominantly physical-based study spaces. In my estimation this approach ignores many of the pitfalls we have found while providing services over the last two and a half years. A culture of on-line study spaces in addition to the physical spaces has potential to offer the same kind of service resilience that libraries have from collecting both electronic and physical books: it maintains access to materials or services if either physical or digital spaces are compromised. From a student support perspective, it allows the libraries to engage and offer regular contact to students who experience increased difficulty accessing physical spaces anyway, whether from illness, disability, mental health issues, or external time pressures. It has the potential to expand access to subject-specialist library staff, of which students may be otherwise unaware. From a staff perspective, the virtual study room proved an interesting area in which Library Assistants were able to gain experience and professional development in a low-risk environment, while the shared staffing model between libraries was not overly onerous on staff time. It may be worth considering that the comparably low uptake of virtual or co-working services is not a result of lack of interest, but rather a reflection on lack of ongoing services, and the development of digital library culture may be worth continued exploration.

*Meghanne Flynn (she/her)*  
*Senior Library Assistant*  
*English Faculty Library*

## REFLECTIONS ON A SERVICE

From a staff perspective, experiences from both of these faculty-based trial services were very positive. The instigation for both services originated in supporting students academically and pastorally in what were seen as unusual circumstances, while using a limited amount of resources and within a quick timeframe to develop.

The experiences from both services might show that for this program to function there does not necessarily need to be a significant outlay in cost for specialized equipment or software for this to function – though internet connectivity remains paramount. What is necessary is a cost outlay in staff time and expertise in the development of inclusive supportive structures at the foundation, and some agility in responding to individual needs of the user groups. It will also need sufficient backup in staffing that there is a potential pool of people who are familiar with the programme and are able to facilitate these sessions. With the collaborative efforts between faculty libraries, such as those under the School of Arts and Humanities, it is possible for this pool of library staff to be distributed among related faculties. This consideration also allows for this model of support to be scaled up in Cambridge in a sustainable way. With buy-in from multiple libraries we can create cross-faculty spaces which do not overly tax libraries with low-staffing levels while offering support to other librarians in the field and the students they serve.

Furthermore, even as students have returned to “normal” physical library spaces, establishing a sense of community remains a significant and ongoing problem for students at Cambridge. Establishing virtual library spaces – particularly across libraries from the same School – can potentially serve to create an ongoing reliable community space in which students can participate.

While this was developed for student mental health, there may be benefits to staff as well. During pandemic services, and since the reopening of libraries, many staff in Faculty libraries have discussed the difficulties in connecting

or reconnecting with students to the extent experienced in pre-pandemic services. The implications on how this functioned as a support for staff and not just students still require reflection, especially as discussions on continuing staff remote working evolve. In the consideration of how this working structure might particularly support students with chronic illness or neurodiversity in accomplishing tasks, it is worth remembering that these conditions also significantly affect library staff who may be running them. With this in mind, and given adequate staffing, co-working spaces may have potential to be supportive workspaces for both students AND staff, while normalising the utilisation of them for all.

## **COPING WITH THE LOCKDOWN AT THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE WIDENER AT HARVARD**

During lockdown, libraries all over the world were being creative and flexible in the way they tried to help readers connect to the information they needed. This was true of libraries across the pond as we shall see.

### **Boston Public Library**

Boston Public Library (BPL), which has provided a ‘free to all’ library service to the American public since 1848, is a remarkable institution. BPL has many acclaimed American firsts – it is the first free municipal library, the first public library to lend books, the first to have a branch library and to have a children’s room. It also happens to be one of only two public libraries in the US that are designated as research libraries. BPL is funded by the City of Boston, and as it is also the Library for the Commonwealth, it gets additional funding from the Massachusetts government as well. The BPL and its 25 branch libraries usually receive nearly 4 million visitors a year. All that changed in March 2020.

When the shutters came down at the BPL many things went online, including their ever-popular Genealogy Workshops. Enquiries moved online. When the library reopened in June 2020 patrons were permitted to come and collect pre-selected books and returned books were quarantined. Anna Fahey-Flynn, Central Library Manager, noted that the footfall was lower than expected. This was partly due to the location – most people would have had to use public transport to get to the Central Library in Copley Square, and many were understandably reluctant to do so, especially during the early days of the pandemic. Furthermore, many people were working from home and no longer coming into the city.

Michael Colford, Director of Library Services at BPL is understandably very proud of their *Books for Boston* program. It was initiated to help the adults and children most at risk, who no longer had free access to books and didn't have adequate resources to access online resources. The program entailed dispatch of thousands of new books to non-profit organisations. These organisations were invited to provide lists of genres that would be of interest, and BPL librarians drew up booklists and sent them to local independent bookstores – who then delivered the books straight to homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, senior residents centres and centres serving children and families in need. This not only secured continued access to books to those in need, but also supported local independent booksellers at this difficult time. The money for the Books for Boston initially came from BPL's own book budget. But then the Boston Public Library Fund – which involves private philanthropy in support of BPL programs and special initiatives – got wind of this program and stepped in to support the program, running fund raisers for this purpose.

So the BPL was able to quickly adapt and help their readers stay informed and entertained during the pandemic.

### **Widener Library at Harvard**

Although the Scan and Deliver service was already in place when the Widener library was forced to close its doors upon lockdown, Odile Harter,



Research and Pedagogy Librarian at the Widener, remarked that soaring demand meant a lot more resources were reallocated for Scan and Deliver.

Access to eBooks opened up everywhere. The Hathi Trust -- a partnership of academic and research institutions -- made available 2 million titles digitized from libraries around the world. The Trust's Emergency Temporary Access Service made it possible for staff and students to access digitised items that corresponded to physical items held by their own library.

The library stepped up its role in supporting teaching and learning. Whole books were scanned and uploaded to the VLE for the purposes of teaching and learning. Apart from the regular planned digitising of Rare Books material, the lockdown brought about informal digitising as well. There was also mediated viewing of Rare Books for lectures.

When libraries reopened, readers were allowed to come and collect requested books. With limited staff working onsite, this led to returned books piling up on the tables with no one to shelve them. Acquisition parcels also piled up as there were not enough librarians onsite to deal with them. This meant that there were fewer tables that were usable. As the Widener was not an ideal space to open to readers at that point, the University decided to open up the nearby Cabot Science library to readers, as it had more suitable study spaces.

One side effect of the pandemic was that non-Harvard readers lost access to the library for about two years – as Harvard, like most other Universities, restricted access to current staff and students. Lack of access to the physical library was a problem for Harvard Professors as well! Quite unusually among University libraries, the Widener has about a hundred offices in the building for the Faculty. Though, as the library was closed, it meant that there was no entry to those offices.

Library doors may have been shut for a while but that didn't mean library services weren't available. Librarians worldwide soon became adept at delivering services digitally. The pandemic appears to have accelerated the

digital shift. It could perhaps be said that the pandemic highlighted the adaptability and resilience of librarians all over the world and it has proved that they have a fundamental role to play in supporting teaching and learning!

*Mary Kattuman, Intermediate Cataloguer, Cambridge University Library, in conversation with Michael Colford, Director of Library Services and Anna Fahey-Flynn, Central Library Manager at the Boston Public Library; and with Odile Harter, Research and Pedagogy Librarian at the Widener Library, Harvard University.*

## CONTACT THE EDITORS

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As Lindsay will also be stepping down soon, we are putting a call out for new editors, including someone to manage the CULIB website. Please contact us at [ucam-culib@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ucam-culib@lists.cam.ac.uk) if you are interested.