

# Library Lounge: Virtual Study Sessions (VSS) -

## Recreating Library Vibes in a Virtual Environment

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Hello, Thank you for having us.

I am Darcy and this is my colleague Jessica. We are here from the University of Strathclyde Library to tell you about our Library Lounge: Virtual Study Sessions.

# Session Outline

- Background to the Virtual Study Sessions (VSS)
- What, When, Who of the VSS?
- Response & Feedback
- Winning an Award – VSS case study
- Our Future Plans

DARCY

So in today's session we will start off with a bit of background as to how these sessions came about and what our intentions for them were.

We'll discuss how these sessions are set up and run

The response we've had about these session

And we'll touch briefly about our plans for the future.

I'm now going to hand you over to Jessica now who is going to start us off with a bit of back ground to these sessions.

## Library Vibes: How you would define “library”?

- Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary: “a building, room, or organization that has a collection of books, documents, music, and sometimes things such as tools or artwork, for people to borrow, usually without payment”.
- Collins COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary: “[...] is a building where things such as books, newspapers, videos, and music are kept for people to read, use, or borrow”.
- The library as a *community hub* and *sharing place*

JESSICA

To understand the success of VSS I think is important to contextualize this project.

I checked a couple of dictionaries for the definition of the word “library”. [read the slides] But the libraries represent much more than this... It’s a safe place for those who are looking for peace; it’s an inspiring place for those who are looking for ideas; it’s a place of motivation for those who are looking for encouragement; it’s a welcoming place for those who are looking to exchange ideas, knowledge, experiences.

I like to think of the library as a community hub and a sharing place.

# The beginning of our journey

- Importance of a *sharing place* during the pandemic
- Awareness of student isolation during pandemic
- Not all students able to visit the physical library
- Group study options were not available in person
- Another way for the Library staff to support students

JESSICA

Especially during the pandemic and the consequent lockdown, the importance of a sharing place becomes more evident.

We were aware that most of our students couldn't visit the physical library, either because they are distance learners, they have not been able to travel back to the UK due to the pandemic, or because of the need to isolate themselves.

As a result, we needed to find another way for Library staff to support our students. The main aim was to build a community and offer support for recreating the physical library vibes on a virtual platform.

And it is with this background that a library team at Strathclyde University decide to develop the idea of the Virtual Study Session.

# Inspiration

- CSGUK conference Nov 2020:
  - University of Sheffield Virtual Library Commons
    - "Come together, Write now" sessions

JESSICA

The initial idea for these sessions came about from a presentation by the University of Sheffield, that our colleagues Lynsey and Kirsten attended, at the Customer Service Group UK Conference in November 2020.

The University of Sheffield Library presented their 'Virtual Library Commons' sessions called 'Come Together, Write Now'.

Discussions of doing something similar then took place between Library staff at Strathclyde.

And in April 2021, the Library initiated Virtual Study Sessions via Zoom.

Now that the Library has opened again, the Virtual Study Sessions are still an integral part of flexible learning, appealing to distance learner students as well as those students who still have many online classes or do not yet wish to physically visit the Library.

# What is a VSS?

- Online study sessions facilitated by Library staff
- Sessions run on Zoom
- Two 2-hour sessions per week
- Introduction, break in the middle, and summing up at the end
- Students study solo and use the Zoom Chat for any queries

DARCY

Ok, so the Virtual Study Sessions are online study groups, held over zoom, facilitated by Library staff.

We organise two 2 hour sessions each week.

Each session starts with a brief introduction – 5 minutes or so - from the Library staff member, and attendees are asked what they hope to achieve during the session.

The attendees are then invited to turn off their microphones and cameras to allow them to concentrate. During this study time we have a 'Session in Progress' slide showing which includes a note encouraging attendees to get in touch with any questions via the Zoom chat.

Half way through the study period we'll take a quick break to chat (with mics and cameras on) and then another break in the final 5/10 minutes. This acts as a wee de-brief to find out how the attendees have managed during the session, and if they achieved what they set out to do.... The results can be varying ;-)

At the start of each month a VSS rota is created. Volunteers from across different departments of the library can sign up for any sessions they would like to run. We try to get a good balance of enquiry staff working alongside background staff to ensure that someone will be on hand to help with trickier enquiries, and where that is not possible, we have a VSS Team Chat set up on Microsoft Teams where we can send up the bat signal for help.

## Virtual Study Session 'Session in progress' slides...



The Library Lounge: Virtual Study Session is in progress

Please contact staff via the Zoom chat button  
Our Study Skills team have really useful guidance on revision at <https://www.strath.ac.uk/studywithus/strathcydeonlinelearning/studyskills/>



DARCY

Here are just a few examples of the 'Shared Screen' slides that the library host puts up during the study session.

These are pictures from our library to help with the library vibe feeling we are trying to create for our students.

During the month of May we used our especially colourful Birthday slide celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> session.

# When are VSS run?



**Library Lounge: Virtual Study Sessions.**  
Provider: Library Services

An alternative way to study with other students in an online managed study environment. These virtual study sessions will help you to dedicate specific time to focus on your coursework whilst feeling connected and supported by studying alongside other students.

The next session will begin on 15/07/2021 at 10:00 AM

0 Days 21 Hours 42 Minutes 10 Seconds

Duration: 2 hours | Course Type: Webinar | Booking Status: Now Booking

Is this course right for me?

Target Audience: All students

Our 'Library Lounge: Virtual Study Sessions' provide the ideal opportunity for you to feel part of the library community by joining a dedicated online study environment facilitated by library staff, enabling you to feel motivated and supported to study amongst other students.

These sessions allow you to have the space and time to focus on your studies away from outside distractions like social media. Staff will be available throughout each session to answer any questions you may have, as well as introduce the format of the session, provide a mid-way break, and close the session.

The sessions will take place using Zoom. Joining details will be sent in advance.

Delivered By: Library Staff  
Draronicita

Course Dates

There are 14 session(s) available

15/07/2021 (10:00 - 12:00)  
1 days to go  
Book Course >

20/07/2021 (14:00 - 16:00)  
4 days to go  
Book Course >

- Sessions run twice a week
  - Tuesdays 2 – 4pm
  - Thursdays 10am – 12pm
- Bookable via online booking system
- Same Zoom details used for each session

## DARCY

Originally the sessions were run every Tuesday afternoon for 2 hours. However, in response to feedback from one of our surveys, we now have our sessions taking place twice a week and at different times of the day.

This allows our internationally based students to attend at a more convenient time to them. And allows students to fit the sessions in around tutorials and lectures.

Sessions are advertised on our online booking system. We also send regular emails from our mailing lists to previous attendees, as well as periodic emails to our University staff contacts too, as they are welcome to join too.

Once someone books onto one of these sessions, we send out the Zoom details. We also make sure we send out booking reminders to attendees on the lead up to the sessions, as we feel these are important for attendance and commitment at the sessions.



# Who attends VSS?

- First sessions ran in the pre-exam diet in April 2021
- Between April 2021 – 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2022 = 713 attendees and 100 sessions run!
- Expectation that students studying for their exams would attend BUT
  - Majority of attendees have been PGRs and Masters students
  - The sessions allow them to connect with students at a similar stage of study/research

DARCY

We had originally anticipated that these sessions would appeal to our undergraduate students, to complement the exam diet in May 2021.

HOWEVER,... The majority of our attendees have been PGRs and Masters students

The sessions have flagged up that this particular group of students benefit from these interactions.

The nature of their study involves a lot of independent working, so these sessions help with motivating each other and making connections as they share their progress with other attendees.

It helps them feel less isolated and part of a wider community. It's also great for peer learning - students and Library staff facilitators may learn something new at every session.

We recently celebrated our 100<sup>th</sup> Virtual Study Session on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

To mark this milestone, we carried out a prize draw, where all students who attended sessions during the month of May were in with a chance of winning one of two £25 Amazon vouchers. The more sessions attended, the more entries to the prize draw they would get. Needless to say the attendance in May was pretty good.

## Response & Feedback 1: What do our attendees say?

It is an amazing experience. It is really nice to communicate with other students and share our feelings and difficulties. The most beneficial part was that I could ask the staff immediately during my work. This support really helped me today.

I think the session is very helpful as it's not 100% formal and we are encouraged to ask any questions and get the support needed straight away.

The session is pretty good. It recreates the library feeling at home and brings a sense of community.

It really improved my efficiency, hope there could be more sessions!

This is just nice, I mean, get used to working virtually and also know people from other research groups.

Good. I feel motivated studying on zoom with other people together.

JESSICA

Here are some of the positive comments from attendees that we have collected through our ongoing Virtual Study Sessions feedback survey. We send this survey out to attendees, in addition to some useful study links, after each VSS session.

We have been blown away by the quality, detail, and positivity of these responses from attendees. As Darcy said, the virtual study sessions had already had more than 713 attendees between April 2021 and May 2022 and an impressive 100% satisfaction rate; all respondents reported finding these sessions useful and that they would study with us virtually again.

## Response & Feedback 2: What do our attendees say?

I found I lost a lot of motivation to work on my dissertation after classes/ lectures ended. I think the virtual study group is a good way to help structure my studying again and boost motivation.

I like the format which allows me to share goals at the start of the session and report on them at the end. It really helps as I've been having issues holding myself accountable recently.

Thank you for your help with finding sources for my essay. It's great to have support from others.

I really enjoyed the session. It helped motivate me to complete my tasks and I enjoyed meeting new people and hearing what they were planning to do in the Zoom.

Thank you, I found it helpful to know that others were also working at the same time, which helped keep me motivated. It would be nice to have a morning session too.

JESSICA

We also received verbal feedback from attendees during the sessions, with attendees stating that:

- It reduced feelings of isolation (from either living alone, not being able to travel to the UK, or feeling like this was a safer alternative to studying in the physical library);
- My favourite says: *"Invisible people become visible in the library"*
- Others mentioned being able to set aside specific coursework to primarily working on during the session, thereby providing themselves with an achievable and measurable goal.

# Testimonials



- <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/79203/>
- This link will take you to 3 student testimonials, answering questions set by library staff, regarding their opinions on the Library Lounge Virtual Study Sessions in the summer of 2021.

JESSICA

We have recordings of 3 of our regular attendees being interviewed by library staff, however as this is a short session we will not show them. If you are at all interested in these interview testimonials they are available in our repository from the following link.

# The Award



- STEPS – Strathclyde's Teaching Excellence Program – Award
  - Virtual Study Sessions case study submitted for the "celebrating innovation and resilience at Strathclyde" Award
  - VSS case study won the Administrative and Professional Services category
- Award funding will be used to develop VSS initiative further

JESSICA

We had an important recognition also from the University when we won the STEPS award. We submitted our case study to the "Celebration of innovation and resilience at Strathclyde" competition and we have been selected by a judging panel for the innovation element of the award.

A group of us recently met to discuss how the funds would be best utilised.

After much discussion, it was felt that there are two main directions that we want the service to go in, one being 'Sharing our Knowledge' and the other being 'Expanding our Service'.

# Sharing our Knowledge



- VSS Toolkit:
  - Help other institutions create their own virtual study sessions
  - Will be openly available via Strathprints by Summer 2022
- Present VSS story at conferences
- Article for CILIPs 'Information Professional' journal

DARCY

For our 'Sharing our Knowledge' element we hope to help external information professionals by creating a VSS Toolkit that can be used to create a similar service in their own libraries. The VSS Toolkit is currently a work in progress, but should be available later in the summer.

We plan for the toolkit to be openly available via the library's institutional repository, so anyone can use the resource should they wish to and apply it to their own circumstances.

We have also attended a number of library conferences such as this one today, spreading the word about the service.

And we plan to write a piece about it in the CILIP 'Information Professional' magazine. There is also a blog post from Jessica forthcoming on the SALCTG blog. – so busy bees!

# Expanding our Service

- Design branding/marketing to help reach more participants
- Follow up on participants' suggestions
  - Breakout rooms
  - Timing the study sessions – online countdown display
  - Longer sessions
  - More sessions
  - Longer breaks
  - Music in the sessions!

DARCY

There are two parts to the 'Expanding our Service' objective: 'Advertising' and 'Attendee's suggestions'.

In terms of the advertising, it is more about marketing the service in a more professional way. Our aim is to establish it in the student psyche and hopefully gain more users of the service through appropriate advertising and branding.

Also, under our 'Expanding our Service' banner we've had suggestions from the participants on how they would like the service to evolve.

- For example, one of our regular participants would like us to investigate the possibility of having breakout rooms in a couple of scheduled sessions, allowing the participants to peer review/proofread each other's work, giving them a chance to help each other out on an informal basis.
- Other suggestions are to make the sessions longer, or have extend breaks to allow for more informal chatting, so they can get to know their study buddies a bit better.

So, as you can see the participants are invested in this service and would like to see it developed further as well.

## Questions and further information?



Are there any other questions or comments?

Please get in touch if you would like further information:

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JESSICA

Darcy and I, along with many of our VSS colleagues and VSS Attendees genuinely learn so much from each other, and we really enjoy facilitating the sessions. Being part of the VSS project allowed us to work with people from different departments across the library, and share different working experiences, hence growing personally and professionally.

Thank you for listening, and for inviting us to present today.

Does anyone have any questions?