

## The Virtual Reading Room: thinking globally, acting locally

Donna McRostie  
*University of Melbourne*, [mcrostie@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:mcrostie@unimelb.edu.au)

Lisa McIntosh  
*University of Sydney*, [lisa.mcintosh@sydney.edu.au](mailto:lisa.mcintosh@sydney.edu.au)

---

Donna McRostie and Lisa McIntosh, "The Virtual Reading Room: thinking globally, acting locally."  
*Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences*. Paper 4.  
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2023/dsd/4>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.  
Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

# The Virtual Reading Room (VRR)

## ....thinking globally, acting locally



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Ms Donna McRostie  
Deputy Director, Research and Collection Stewardship  
The University of Melbourne  
[mcrostie@unimeleb.edu.au](mailto:mcrostie@unimeleb.edu.au)



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

Ms Lisa McIntosh  
Director, Access Services  
University of Sydney  
[lisa.mcintosh@sydney.edu.au](mailto:lisa.mcintosh@sydney.edu.au)





# Acknowledgment of Country

# University of Sydney and University of Melbourne



54 000+

students

51% undergraduate 49% graduate  
(equivalent full-time student load - EFTSL)

430 000+

living alumni

40%

international students

from 150 nationalities

24%

undergraduates

undertook an international experience

\$500

million

research income



# 1

in Australia



# 33

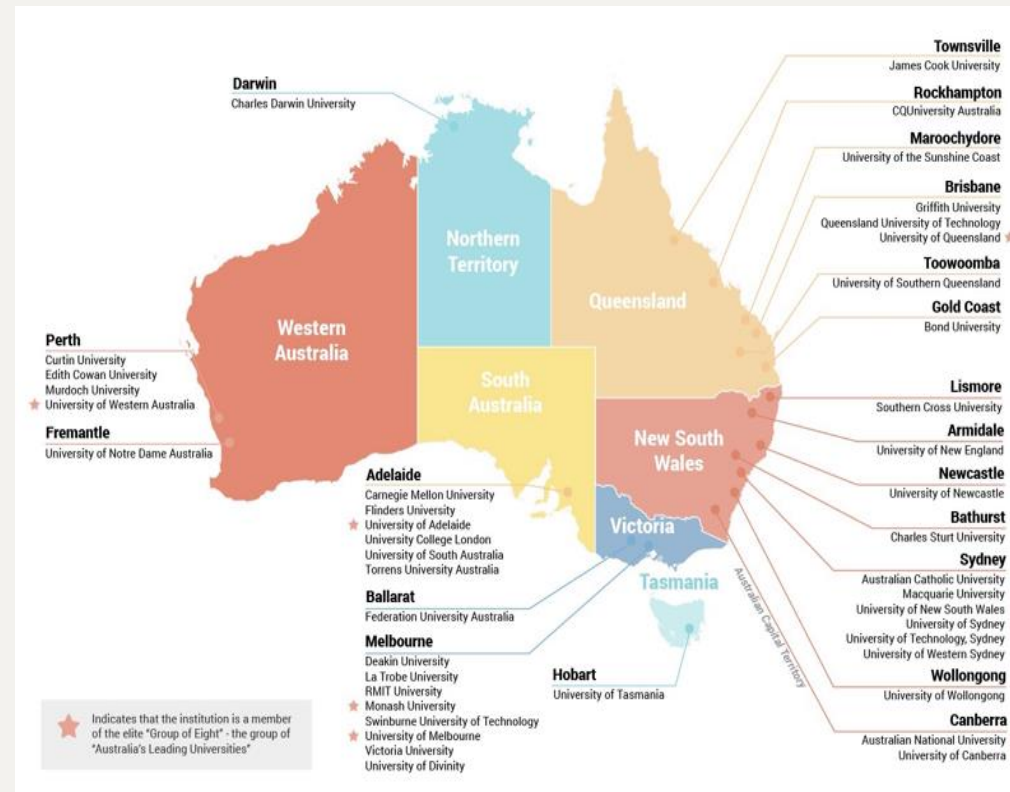
in the world



# 8

in graduate employability  
worldwide

Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2021/QS Graduate Employability 2021



Facts & figures

About us

73,000

students (based on  
student enrolments  
as at August 2019)

8100

continuing and fixed-  
term staff (based on  
University statistics at  
31 December 2018)

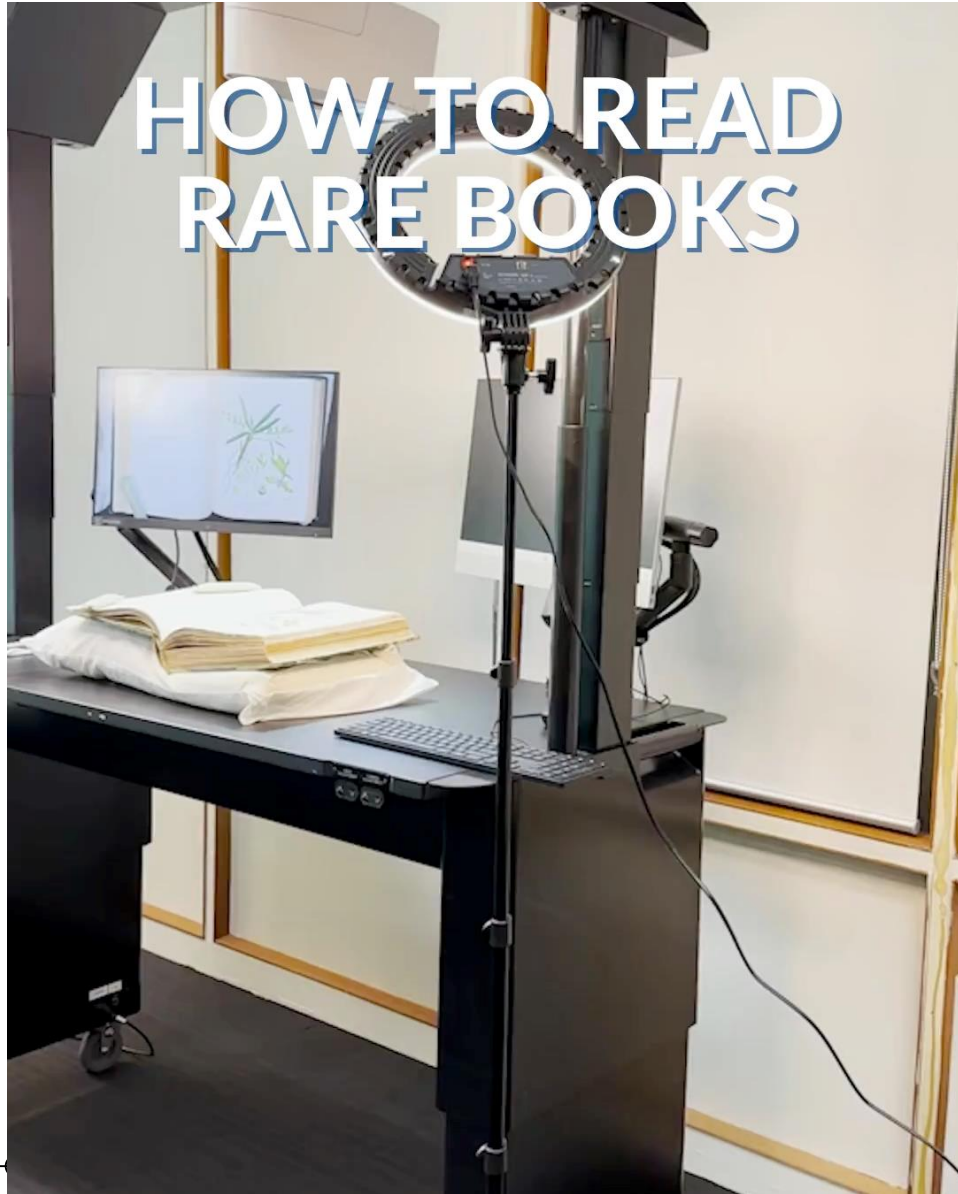
250+

exchange  
opportunities

380,000

alumni in more than  
170 countries

# What is a Virtual Reading Room (VRR)?



Virtual Reading Rooms (VRRs) and Virtual Teaching Spaces (VTSs) provide human-mediated remote digital access to collections for research and teaching

Originally a reactive, often improvised, response to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on collections access

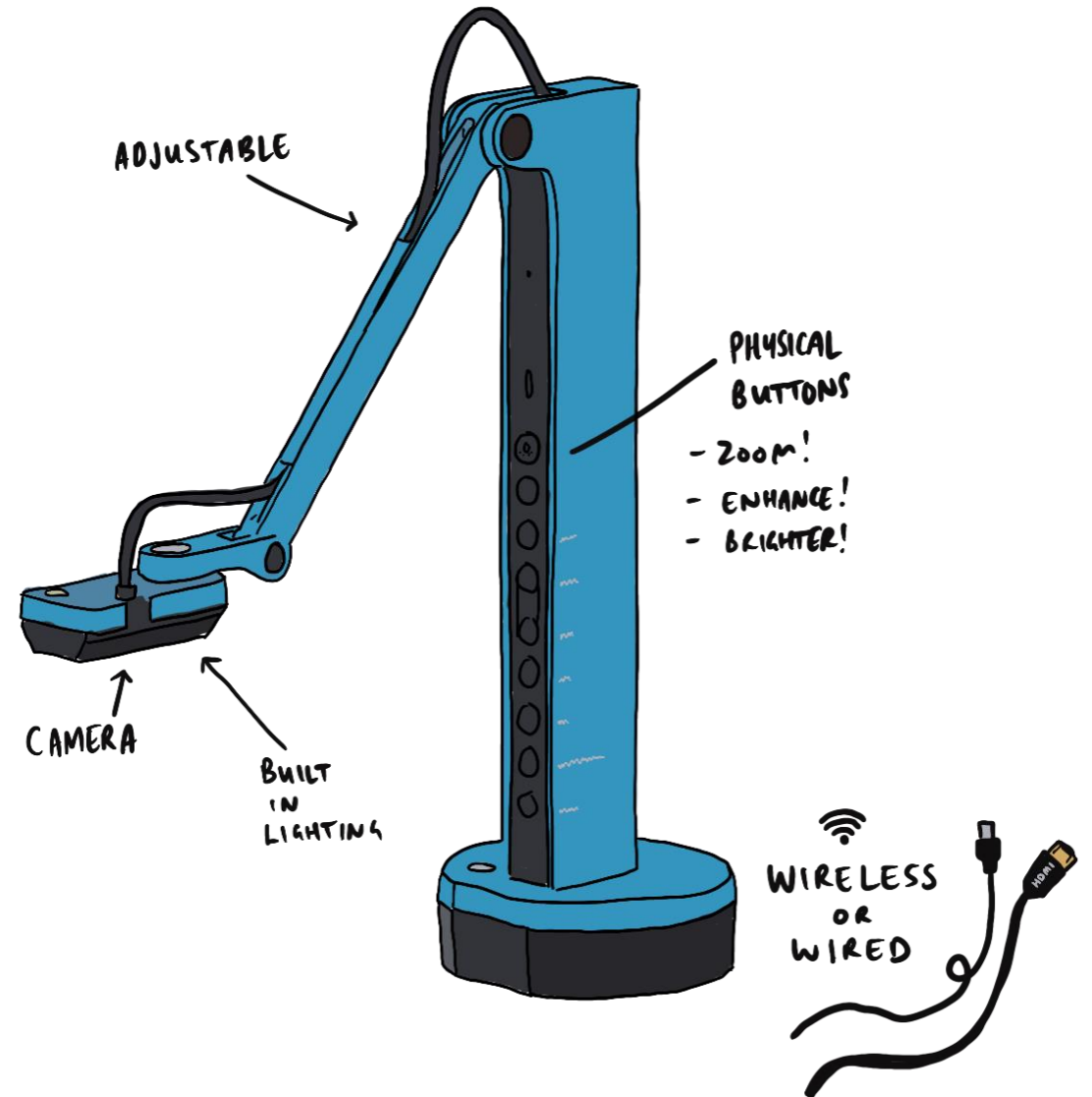
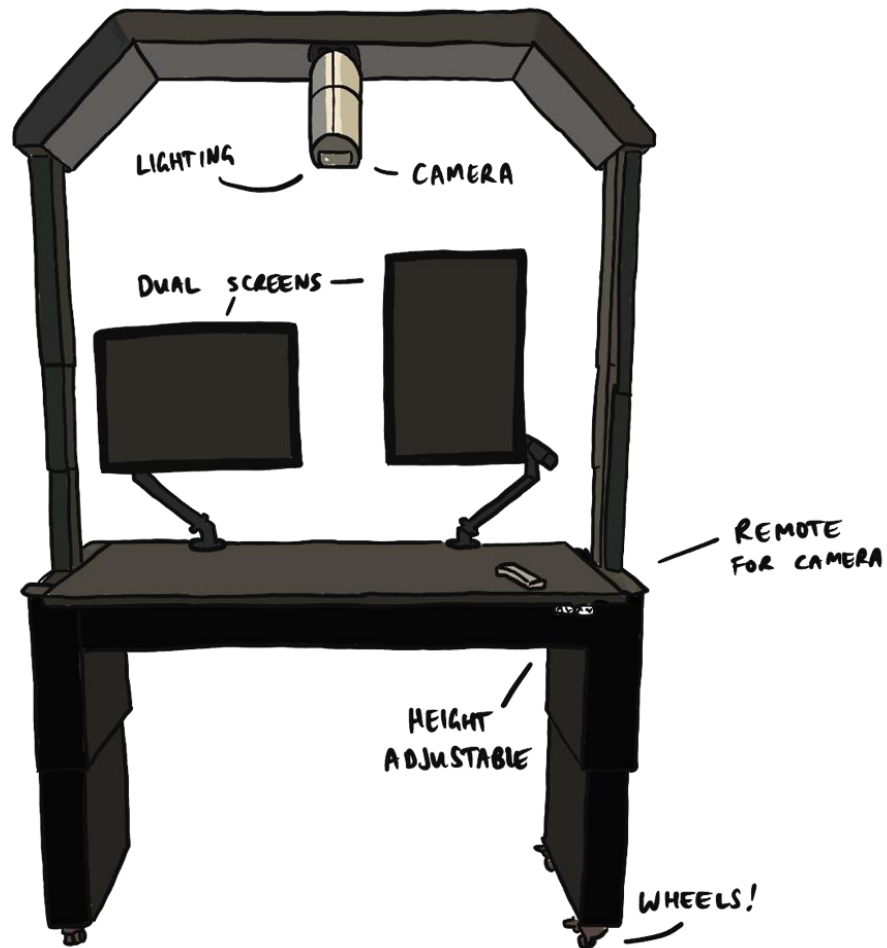
Now for many institutions a successful reference and teaching service to aid collection and/or regarded as an important emerging service

# Collaborative Approach to VRR Service Establishment

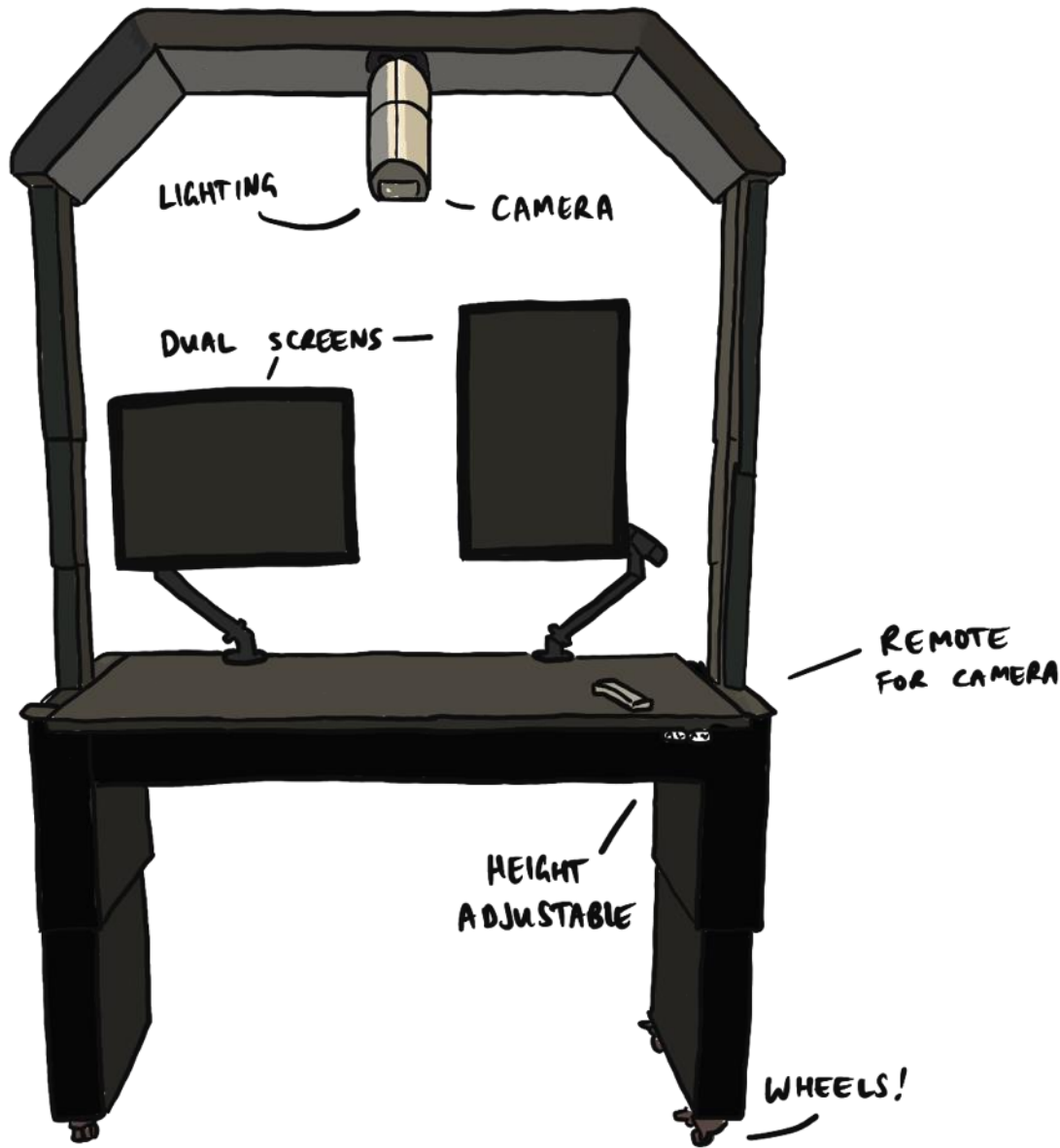
- Research Libraries UK (RLUK) Special Collections and Heritage Network (SCHN) reported on the use of VRR/VTS services in May-June 2021 based on survey of 32 institutions
- An International Alliance of Research Library Associations (IARLA) cross-sector working group established late 2021 continues to foster development and collaborative opportunities – Global Sprint
- University of Sydney and University of Melbourne Collaboration- Pilot and Service Model



# Technical Approaches



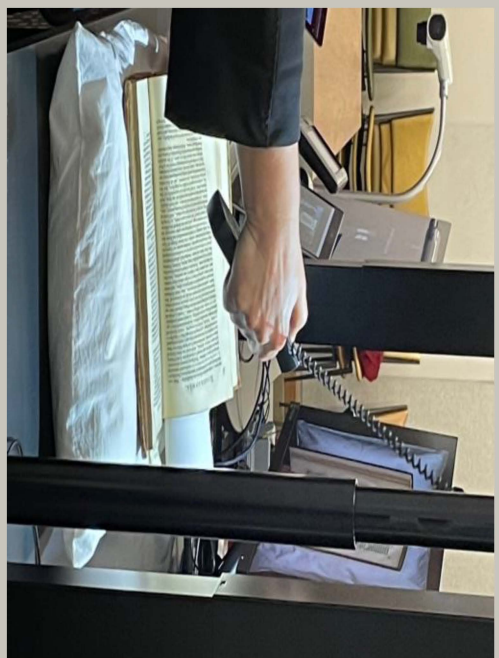
# The University of Melbourne - WolfVision VZ-C6



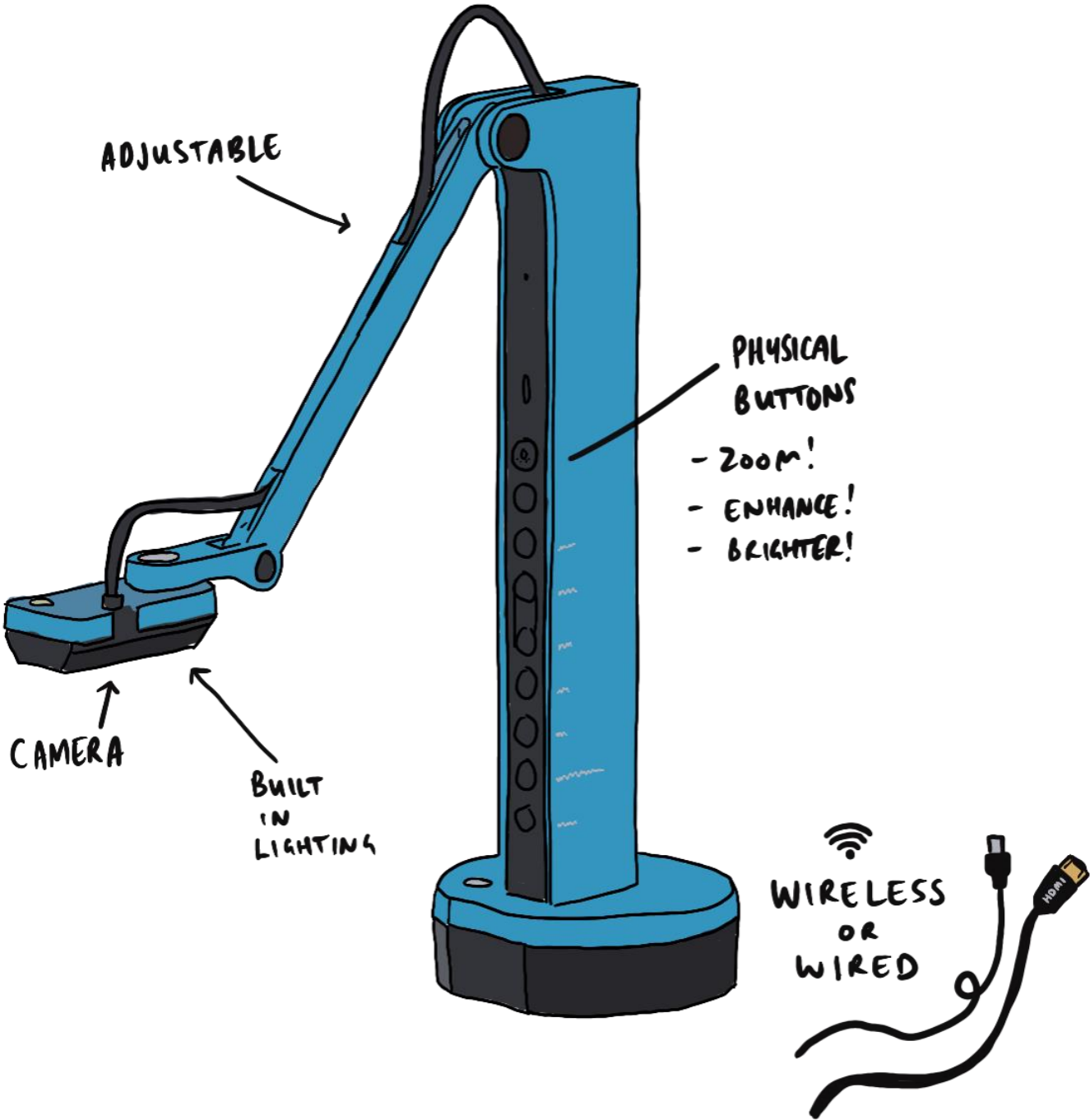
- Equipment purchased after review of VRR/VTS solutions across IARLA members
- Visualiser mounted on movable trolley with sit/stand capacity
- Trolley built to all UOM OHS requirements and accessibility standards and supported/serviced via Learning Spaces in Service Now
- Sessions can be presented live to in-person and/or remote participants, recorded and uploaded into Kaltura and Canvas platforms.







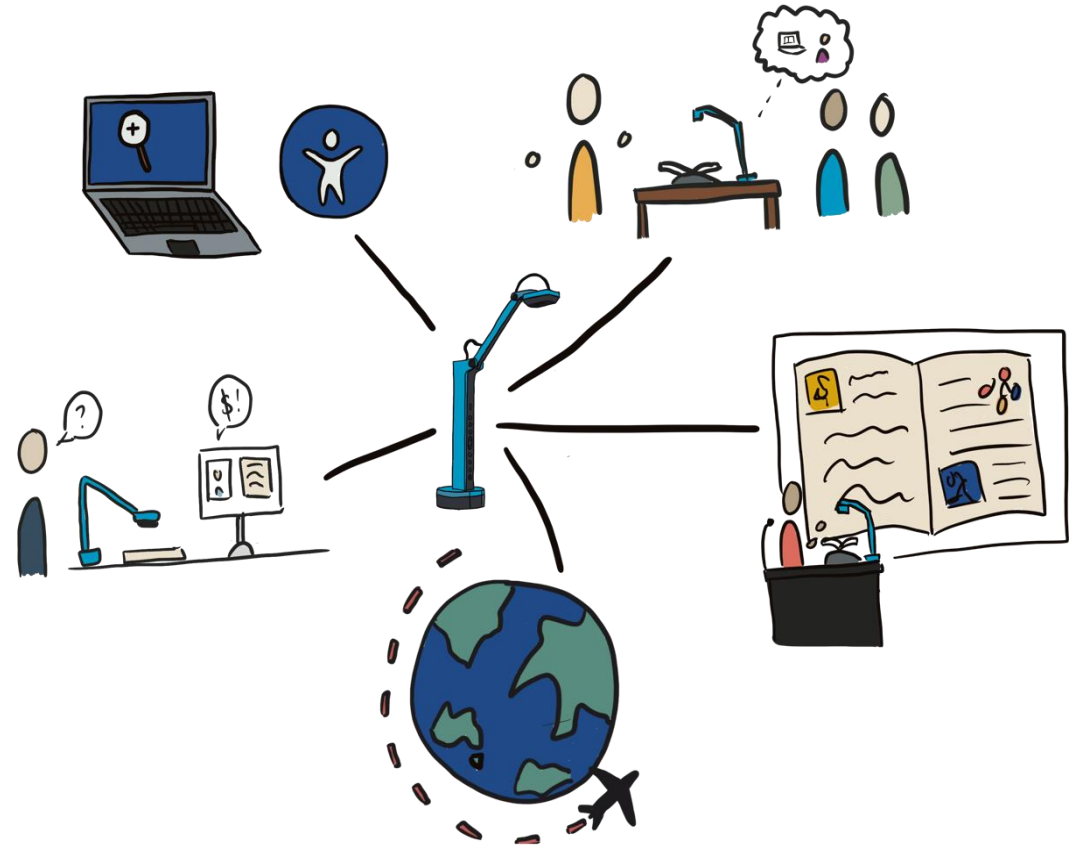
# University of Sydney IPEVO VZ-X





# Use Cases

- Ability to access two of Australia's largest special collections in an academic library remotely for the first time
- Material that wouldn't otherwise be able to be digitised can be accessed
- Allowing for accessibility of collection to people that use screen zooming software to read material, immunocompromised people able to access materials remotely
- Opens collection up without need to travel (interstate/internationally)
- Community engagement



As a researcher living in Western Australia, I want to be able to access Rare Books and Special Collections items without having to fly to Sydney so that I can use them in my research without seeking additional funding.

· As a journalist writing a book review written about Georgiana McCrae, I want to be able to check a reference in her diary without paying to have the item digitised so that I can write an accurate article

· As a Rare Books and Special Collections staff member, I want to be able to show external researchers items even when the Library has restricted access so that no clients are disadvantaged

· As an Object Based Learning Coordinator, I want to be able to run object based learning sessions for mixed delivery classrooms so that the remote learners are able to have a similar experience to those on site

· As a presenter at a Rare Bites talk, I want to show the audience the features of the book I'm speaking about, to create a more engaging experience for the audience

· As a Digital Collections staff member, I want to be able to show unusual items to vendors when undertaking digitisation work so that we can get more accurate quotes and avoid overspend

· As a Rare Books or Digital Collections staff member, I want to be able to show clients items to help make the decision about whether items should be digitised or not to better focus our digitisation spend on items that will be used

· As an Object Based Learning Coordinator, I want to be able to record a video of an item to be embedded into the Learning Management System so that students are able to view a learning session in their own time.

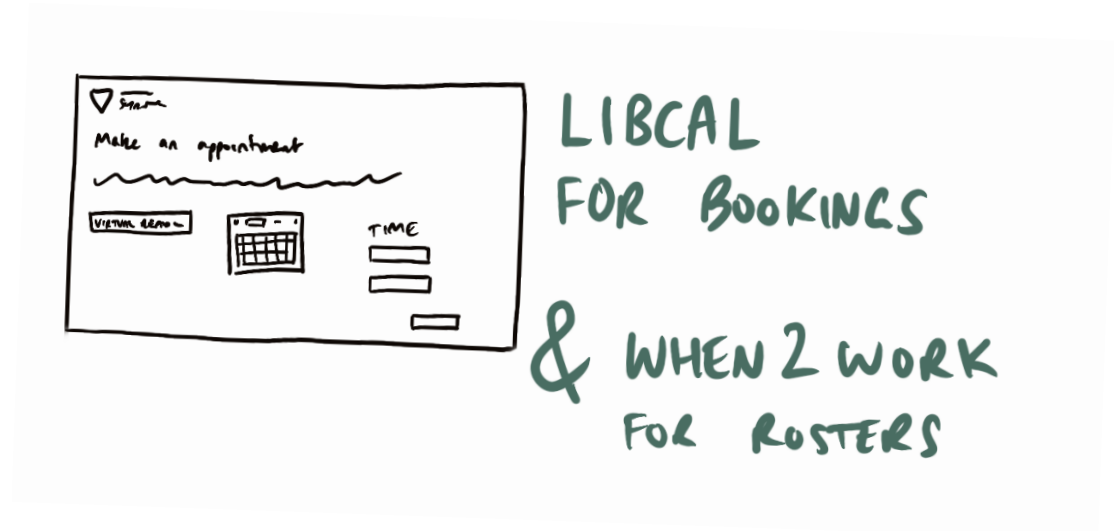
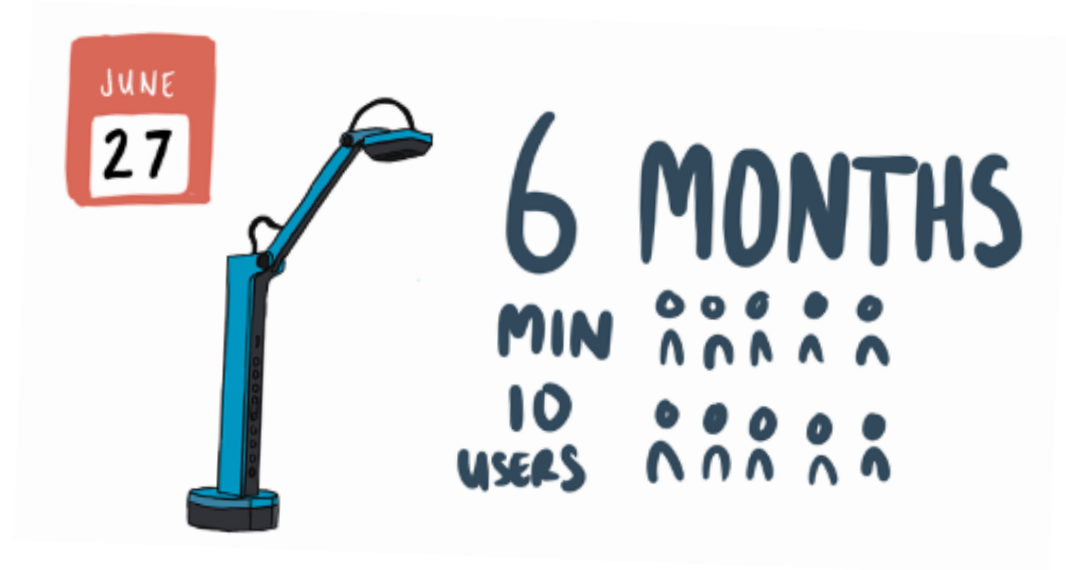
· As a teaching academic, I want to run online classes via a Virtual Teaching Space so that my students have equitable access to RBSC materials in my class, and so that we can all look at specific objects together as the same time.

· As a researcher with vision impairment, I want to be able to access Rare Books material with a visualiser so that I can use my screen reader and examine the contents.

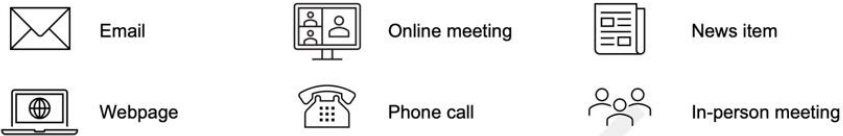
# User Stories



# Sustainability, Scalability and Resourcing



Pilot project communication



Audience	Deliverable	Frequency	Owner	Priority	Preferred way to deliver	Content/output
Manage closely stakeholder group	Status report	Fortnightly	Kim	High priority. Must provide		Status of pilot Updates on any issues Key facts/figures
Ops group	Status report	Monthly				
VRR project team	Project steering group	Fortnightly	Kim	Medium, can be rescheduled but must occur once a fortnight		Minutes Change requests
University of Melbourne Library	Regular meeting	Fortnightly	Kim Lisa	High		Status of pilot projects Updates on any issues Key facts/figures Lessons learned
Keep informed group	Project update	Monthly	Kim	Medium		Short paragraph update to be included in divisional newsletters
Whole Library	News item	Start and end point of VRR pilot	Kim	Medium		Short news stories on VRR service to keep Library staff informed
Frontline staff	Item at Fisher/Law team meetings and newsletter	1 week ahead of VRR pilot launch	Kim	High		Explanation of what the project is, and how long it will be running for so that Frontline staff are aware of the

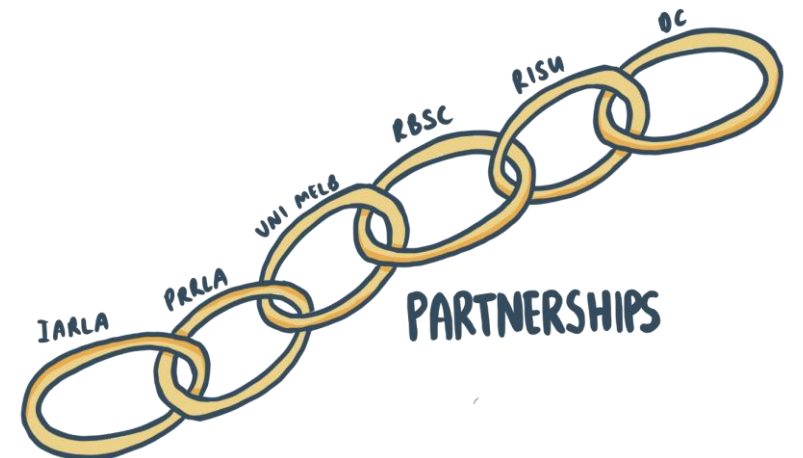
# Implementation

- Guides
- Training
- Workshops
- Communication plan
- Evaluation criteria



# Key Takeaways and Early Learnings

- Legal Frameworks – copyright and privacy
- Cultural protocols
- Opening collections for different audiences /different ways
- Strengthening global professional networks/collaborative models
- Additional use cases - supporting Digitisation and Conservation workflows
- Scalable model – technical support, digital skills





# Thankyou ...Questions

University of Melbourne Virtual Reading Room Reading room

<https://library.unimelb.edu.au/asc/reading-room/virtual-reading-room>

University of Sydney Virtual Reading Room

<https://www.library.sydney.edu.au/collections/rare-books/virtualreadingroom.html>

Joint Press Release UOM & UOS

<https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2022/november/virtual-reading-room-makes-rare-and-special-collections-available-to-all>

