

Calm Spaces Project – Case studies

Background to the project

This ALN Innovation Fund project came about due to a sense at both the University of Huddersfield and Sheffield Hallam University that more understanding was needed of the way students like to use Calm Spaces and the attributes such spaces need to have in order to succeed. The majority of research we were able to access tended to focus on Sensory Spaces, as opposed to Calm Spaces. In both universities, the space in question was a quiet area, designed to give students a calming, peaceful place to go to reduce sensory overload, but not explicitly a Sensory Space. A discussion between two of the Librarians involved, Kate McGuinn (Huddersfield) and Julia King (Sheffield Hallam) at the ALN EDI Ideas Bazaar in March 2025 made us realise that we shared a common aim. A bid was submitted for research funding, which was successful and the project started soon afterwards.

Context: University of Huddersfield

The Calm Zone was created at the University of Huddersfield Library in 2021, following a request from the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) for a relaxing break-out space for students in the Library. This stemmed from reports of increasing numbers of students experiencing high levels of anxiety during and after the COVID 19 pandemic. The Calm Zone is a small area located next to a Silent Study area on Floor 5 of the Library, well away from busy areas. Facilities provided there include comfy seating, plants, framed pictures and “inspiring” quotations, a small leisure reading collection and cheap or free colouring and puzzle resources, together with coloured pencils. It was furnished and equipped “on a shoestring” using furniture which was no longer needed in other areas. This led to a mishmash of bright and sometimes clashing colours in the space. Some evaluation of the space had been done prior to this project, but it was unfortunately not acted on at the time. This, therefore, has been an opportunity to perform an in-depth evaluation of the Calm Zone. A central aim at was to procure detailed qualitative data in the form of interviews with student users and non-users of the space to find out what our students use the Calm Zone for and ways in which it could be developed. We also wanted to see what was happening with similar spaces at other universities.



The Calm Zone at Huddersfield before the project started

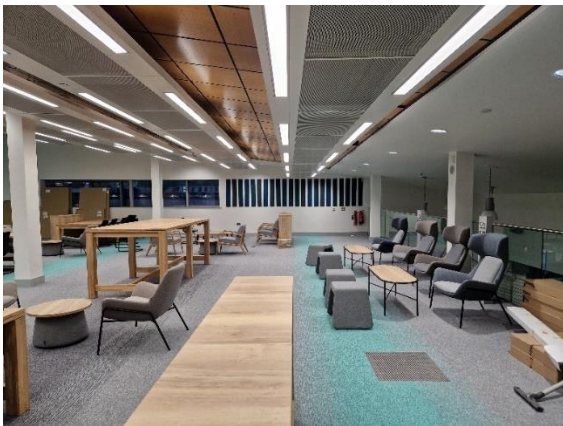


Context: Sheffield Hallam University

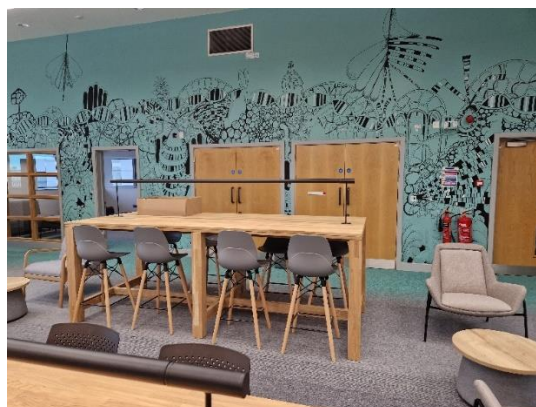
During the academic year of 2024-25, the University identified a need for designated 'calm spaces' throughout the University's premises. At the same time, the Adsetts Library was starting a larger project looking at library spaces in general. After meeting with Kate at the ALN EDI Ideas Bazaar in April 2025 and talking about Calm Spaces, we realised that we could work together on a joint project. The focus of Sheffield Hallam's project was to investigate what the students would like to see in a library environment and how they would use any new spaces.

The Adsetts Library is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and students often work long hours in the library. We wanted to create a space where students could step back from their intensive studies and relax in more comfortable surroundings away from PCs and laptops. As we wanted this to be a space for all students to use, creating a 'Take a Break' space aligned more closely to the requirements than a 'Calm Space'.

A space on the level 4 (entrance level) mezzanine of Adsetts Library was identified as a suitable area for different library environments, including 'The Lounge', a 'Family Room' and the 'Take a Break' space



The Lounge area consisting of comfy chairs, low tables and high tables



Take a Break room (awaiting finishing touches)



Visits to other universities

During the summer of 2025, the research team undertook three visits to other universities to view calm spaces which were already established. These were the Snug in the Bill Bryson Library at Durham University, the Living Room in the JB Morrell Library at the University of York and the Living Rooms in the Seaborne Library at the University of Chester. It was invaluable to be able to see these areas and talk to other librarians about how they had established their spaces and decided what to put in them, also how students tend to use their spaces. It was interesting to see that games, jigsaws, craft items, fidget toys, ear defenders and other small items were offered to students to use in all three spaces. We asked librarians about their experiences with providing these items. Apart from some thefts of sensory room equipment in Chester, librarians reported that students tended to respect the rules around using these items in the designated areas only and not trying to take them outside the Library. This gave us confidence to try out providing similar resources in our spaces.



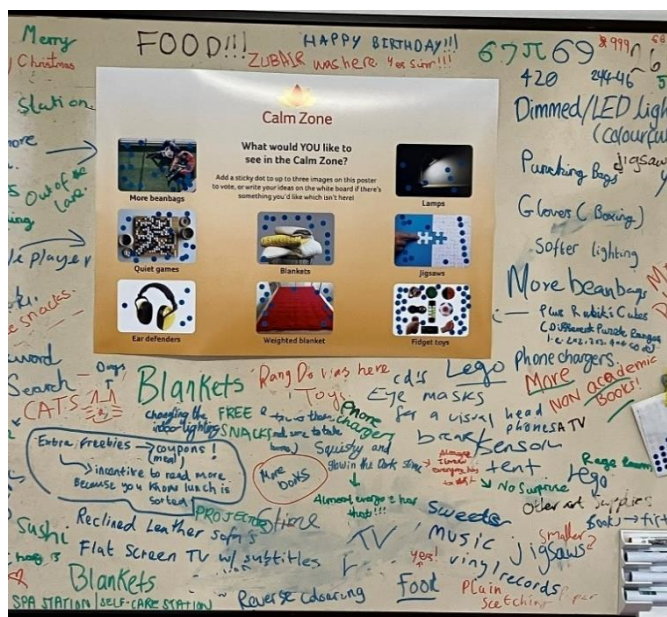
Some other ideas which we took away to consider were the user of screens to create zones in our spaces which we saw in Durham, the addition of more comfy floor furnishings such as beanbags and floor cushions, and the beautiful felt leaf pattern sound proofing screen in York's Living Room. We were inspired by the idea of making our spaces more like a living room you would find in a residential home. The visits inspired the Huddersfield team in particular to consider how we could make our Calm Zone into a space which is homely and cosy, rather than functional. One idea which we found in Durham was the use of a simple Ikea unit to house games and jigsaws. This gave the area a more domestic feel and kept mess to a minimum. We were also interested to hear that at the University of York, feedback from students about harsh lighting had been responded to and softer LED lights had been installed throughout the Library.

Research methodology - Huddersfield

Two approaches were taken to the student focussed research. The first was the use of UX techniques, in particular Love/Breakup letters and a Mood Board. Inspired by the visits to other universities, a mood board was designed featuring items and resources which could potentially be introduced to the Calm Zone and students were asked to vote for their three top ideas using sticky dots, or alternatively to add their own ideas to a whiteboard. Stationery encouraging students to write their own love and breakup letters was left in the Calm Zone at the same time. This method was chosen as a research technique because it usually provides rich

It was decided that interviews with students should be carried out to supplement the UX data. As funding had been provided by the ALN, it was possible to pay students for their time – this was a crucial factor in the success of recruiting students to be interviewed. The seven students who were interviewed were a mixture of first, second and third year undergraduates. Four were already regular users of the Calm Zone, but three were not. This mixture was helpful as it gave insights not only into how regular users spend their time in the zone, but also some of the reasons why students don't use it. Five of the students interviewed had at least one disability diagnosis. Five had been diagnosed as neurodivergent and two of these students additionally had a physical disability.

An interview guide was designed to prompt discussion, but it was not adhered to strictly and students were encouraged to go off at tangents and talk about anything they wanted to in connection with the Calm Zone. This meant that the character of the data collected differed quite a lot from student to student. For example, an interior design student had some interesting things to say about the colour and décor of the Calm Zone. Another, who had a diagnosis of ADHD and autism, talked at length about how the space helps her to recover when she feels overwhelmed. She had several suggestions to make which would help her and other neurodivergent students to benefit more from the space.



We designed our mood board over the summer and had it in the Calm Zone from August 2025 to January 2026. We chose items to go on it which were inspired by our visits to Durham, Chester and York. We asked students to vote for their favourite items using sticky dots, or to suggest their own ideas. The most popular items, according to the voting dots, were fidget toys, weighted blankets, individual games, jigsaws and beanbags.

There were several other interesting suggestions on the whiteboard, including a sensory tent, eye masks, reverse colouring and lego. Some suggestions were presumably tongue in cheek, for example a reclining leather sofa, flatscreen TV, punching bags and cats! Lighting was mentioned by several people who commented.

We have analysed these data together as it is all detailed, qualitative data and many of the same themes emerged from both the letters and the interviews. Students were very honest and vulnerable in what they shared about their lives and use of the Calm Zone, which makes this particularly valuable data.

Students who are already in the habit of using the Calm Zone were asked for their reasons for going there and how they spend their time. A range of different reasons were given. Student A (a Law Student) said that as she uses the Pomodoro method of study, she likes to have a completely different place to go in the Library to take her breaks. She spends her time there colouring or reading a book which she brings with her. Student C (a

Science student), by contrast, likes to study in the Calm Zone. She is awaiting an ADHD diagnosis and finds it easier to maintain focus when she is able to move around the library and use a variety of different types of work space. She finds it easy to study in the Calm Zone as there are side tables on some of the chairs, which she likes to use. She also goes there for “down time”, to be on her own. Student E (an Arts student) also uses the Calm Zone to help her manage ADHD, in particular to ground herself when she has been hyper-focussed on work. It helps her to have a place to go which is physically separate from workspaces, where she can rest her eyes and relax after a period of intense work when she has “lost track of time”. Her time is spent mostly with her eyes closed to block out the “intense” lighting. She also likes to walk around the Calm Zone – she uses walking as a “stimming technique”. Reading a few things in the room and having a “nosy around” helps her to calm down and get grounded. These comments were echoed by Student F (a Music student) who mentioned that although she wasn’t in the habit of using the Calm Zone due to a lack of awareness, she would in the future as she often leaves lectures feeling quite stressed and that “it will be nice to have somewhere to sit and de-stress”.

When asked about the activities which are provided in the Calm Zone, most focussed on the colouring and puzzle sheets as being a welcome addition. Several also mentioned enjoying the new folder of one player games which was recently added to the Calm Zone. Student F commented positively about these activities in her love letter, stating “the activity table is a pleasing addition and the perfect height for people to sit on the floor. Baron Greenfoot, the pencil sharpener made me smile.” Several interviewees asked for more variety of these types of occupation, and a higher level of challenge, with a couple of people mentioning that they found some of the current offerings more suited to children. A couple of the students mentioned that it would be good to have some more innovative colouring materials available, such as reverse colouring.

Things which put students off using the Calm Zone

All of the students who had not already used the Calm Zone said that it was because they were not aware of it until they were recruited to take part in this research. Of the students who were regular users, but expressed an opinion about deterrents to using the space, the most common reason was that they sometimes saw too many people already in the space and this put them off going in. Student F, who has a neurodiversity diagnosis, mentioned as well that if she is feeling overwhelmed or upset, she doesn’t want to go to the Calm Zone, as it is in the Silent Study area. If she feels tearful, she is afraid of being overheard.

All students were asked to think of ways we could better publicise the Calm Zone to students. They mentioned ideas such as using the SU’s social media channels, including the Disabled Students Network. Other ideas were making sure it is mentioned in all inductions and library tours, posters around the Library and screens around campus and improving the signage from the larger staircase on Floor 5. Student F said that she thought disabled students are the ones who will benefit the most from the Calm Zone, but added that she didn’t want us to publicise it more as it would then become busier!

What students like and dislike about the Calm Zone

Furniture

The furniture was generally appreciated as being a bit more comfortable than the desk chairs in the Library, but comments were not overwhelmingly positive. The sofa was found to be uncomfortable by two students, one of whom described it as hard and the other as itchy! The piece of furniture which came in for most praise was the beanbag, but several students pointed out that over the years it has gone quite flat! Student E also mentioned that she was sometimes anxious about sitting on the beanbag as it seemed quite noisy to her and she was worried about disturbing students working in the silent study area. Student F agreed with this, saying that it would be nice to get “some comfy things that don’t make a noise!” A new beanbag and floor cushions were suggested by several other students. The tables were described by two students as being too small for some activities, such as jigsaws and games.

The positioning of furniture was singled out by three interviewees. Students C and F highlighted their need to avoid being seen sometimes when they visit the Calm Zone. Student F said “All the seating faces inwards. There is nowhere to go if you don’t want to be seen.” Student C mentioned that she liked the sofa, but that it was too close to the entrance, so if she sat on it, she could be seen by people walking past, which increased her anxiety. She said that one way around this problem would be to add more screening at the entrance to the Zone. Student G raised another issue with the positioning of furniture. She felt that the layout was “a bit clinical,” also “crowded”. She was in favour of replacing some of the many chairs with “something more cosy,” again mentioning beanbags and floor cushions.

Lighting

Most of the comments which were made by students about the lighting were negative. This was one of the strongest themes which came through in all methods of data collection, including the love/breakup letters written by visitors to the Calm Zone and the mood board. Student A stated that she was “not a fan of bright, artificial light. No overhead lights with lamps instead would be preferable. Not having the neon white LED lights would also be great.” She also suggested smaller light sources in the Calm Zone such as string lights. Student C echoed this saying “dimmable lighting would be ideal, or removing the tubes and having lamps would be even better.” One word which came up several times in relation to the lighting was “harsh”. Student E said in her letter to the Calm Zone, “I hate the lighting, it is very intense”. In her interview she mentioned that she gets eye strain sitting at a computer and when she comes to Calm Zone she needs to rest her eyes. Lamps were also thought to be “more homely” by Student G.

Sound levels

The sound levels in the Calm Zone were generally found to be good for most interviewees. The only slightly negative comments, as already stated, were to do with students worrying about making a noise themselves, either when they are feeling emotional or when they use the beanbag. Only Student E, who has a diagnosis of ADHD and autism, mentioned being bothered by unwanted noise due to auditory sensitivity. In her own words: “When I am overwhelmed, the little noises can feel stifling”. She said that at times like that she found the clicking of computer keyboards in the Silent Study area annoying and that it would be nice to have ear defenders available to borrow in the Calm Zone. Student F said that if anything, the Calm Zone is sometimes too quiet! In her letter she wrote “The crushing weight of your constant silence makes it hard to breathe. Even as I write this letter, I’m hyper-aware of every noise my pen makes.”

Colour scheme

Students were not asked explicitly to comment on the colour scheme, so all the comments received on this were unsolicited and most were positive. Student B described it as “nice” in the love/breakup letter she wrote and Student F commented “I like your colour scheme”. Student A also mentioned the “colourful vibe” positively. The only slightly negative comments were made by two students who found the furniture and rug too brightly coloured.

Comments about the Calm Zone in general

Several comments were made by students which didn’t neatly fit into any other categorisation but were nonetheless interesting. These included positive comments on the pleasant atmosphere created by the natural light from the windows and the plants and the idea that it “feels like a calm space” (Student A). Student G wrote in her love letter “I love that the Calm Zone is facing a window and that I can see the sky while taking a break. The plants are a nice touch as well.” Student C mentioned the plants as well, though she commented that some of them need repotting or watering. Student F mentioned that “your plants are looking a little....tired. I’d love to see some more perked up greenery, even if it has to be faked!” Student C described the space as “secluded and not too big”. She also wrote a love letter, which stated “You have qualities I haven’t seen anywhere else; you’re cozy, calming, quiet and reassuring. You help me when I feel anxious and overwhelmed

and you support me through my revision. You are comfortable and engaging. I like that you have many plants and individual, isolated seats.”

Student D in her letter commented “The Calm Zone is quite comfortable and a good area to just sit and ponder or do something quiet and fun.” The separation of the Calm Zone from the rest of the library was also commended by Student E, who said “I love having a separate space that I can come to, it being physically separate is very helpful”. Comments like this feel like validation of the Calm Zone, as this is just the kind of feeling we were hoping it would give students.

There were not many negative comments about the Calm Zone in general. The most vehement negative comment was made by Student C who stated in her love/breakup letter “I don’t like the entry to you, or the way it’s not more isolated.” She had mentioned this in her interview as well saying that she would love to have more screening at the entrance to the zone as she doesn’t like to see people walking past and looking in when she is there. This theme was echoed by Student F who said in her love/breakup letter “To make this work I need...a smidge more privacy, then I’d know I always have you to rely on.” Finally, Student G commented that the books in the Calm Zone look as though they are “on display” rather than available to read and borrow. Some signage stating that would rectify this issue.

What would students like to remove from the Calm Zone?

These were questions which were put to students, and they produced some interesting and sometimes surprising comments. Student A said that she would like to get rid of the window photo above the Procrastination Station because it “looks like a stock image and the window effect is odd.” This was echoed by Student B. Student C disliked the rug, although she was the only interviewee who mentioned this negatively. She said that she didn’t like the pattern and had previously tripped over the edge of it. The colouring sheets and puzzles came in for criticism from Student E, who found them “a bit childish”, but said that she would like to see some more grown-up colouring and puzzles in the Zone. As previously mentioned, a few students thought that there were too many armchairs in the Calm Zone and would like to see them replaced with more beanbags and floor cushions.

What would students like to add to the Calm Zone?

The most popular suggestions for items to be added to the Calm Zone, which were mentioned by at least four students and which also received the most votes on the Mood board were:

- More varied colouring materials including reverse colouring
- Fidget toys
- Weighted blankets
- Bean bags and floor cushions
- Small jigsaw puzzles
- Small individual games or puzzles such as packs of cards, Rubik’s cubes
- A Chess set
- Dividers or screens to create zones and increase privacy

Less popular suggestions, made by one or two students were:

- Different art on the walls which doesn’t look so “corporate and bland”
- Magazines
- More HudReads books on the shelves
- A water fountain
- Eye masks
- Ear defenders
- Sensory items such as fibre optic tails, glitter toys, floating bubble toys or lava lamps

- Posters giving information about grounding techniques
- More plug sockets

Sensory room

Student D said that she would like to have a separate space to go to, distinct from the study area with its own door which can be closed. Ideally this would have adjustable lighting. Student F made a similar comment saying that she would like to have “a partitioned area with a ceiling on it, which would enable people with light sensitivity to use lower lighting”.

Research Methodology - Sheffield Hallam

As discussed above, members of the research team from Huddersfield and Sheffield Hallam visited three other University libraries who have established calm spaces. These provided invaluable information on their experiences setting up their spaces and how the students have used them. The experience of theft and poor student behaviour at one University reinforced our decision to ensure that the ‘Take a Break’ space needed to be visible whilst remaining separate from the main library environments.

It was decided to use a mixed methodology approach at Sheffield Hallam.

- A short questionnaire has been produced using Qualtrics [[LINK TO QUESTIONNAIRE](#)]
- A small focus group.
- A student panel made up of our student partners

It was originally intended to gain ethics approval for the research to take place. This proved to be a more complex process than originally anticipated, which delayed the launch of questionnaire and focus groups. In the academic year 2025-26 the decision was made to change the focus of the project from a research project to a user experience project aimed at student informed service improvement. This meant that we could go ahead with project without the research element or research ethics approval. However, all responses from students are anonymised and no student can be identified

Due to the delay to undertaking the full range of initially designed user experience activities, and our requirement to open the space by September 2026, the decision was taken to focus on the Student Partner panel to gather insights and experience.

Findings – Sheffield Hallam

Student Panel

An online meeting held on Microsoft Teams in March 2026 was held with our student partners. The student partners are employed by the library for user experience and service improvement projects. The students are representatives from across the University with members for each of the three Colleges, across degree programmes and across all levels of study. The event included pre-meeting preparation, attendance at the meeting and post-meeting reflections.

Pre-Meeting activity

Students were asked to reflect on a previous visit they had made to the Adsetts or Collegiate Library, and answer a series of questions. Their responses were recorded using [Padlet](#), to allow the students to directly add comments, images, links etc.

Students were asked which Library they visited and at what time. 18 students responded with 88% visiting the Adsetts Library on City Campus and 11% visiting the Collegiate Library. The time of day the students attended

varied, with 15.7% visiting in the morning, 52.6% visiting in the afternoon, 10.5% visiting in the evening and 15.7% visiting during breaks in between lectures.

Students were then asked what type of space they preferred to study in – silent, quiet or group areas. 15 students responded to this question.

- Silent 25%
- Quiet 56.2%
- Group 18.7%
- Study room 25%

This shows a clear preference for a quieter study environment, with 81.2% stating they preferred a silent or quieter study environment.

19 students responded to the question 'Did you find this (visit) a good or bad experience. 63% rated their experience as good, with 5.2% bad and 10.5% expressing no view.

The Online Panel Meeting

The online panel meeting took place using Microsoft Teams. The aim of the meeting was to explore how the students felt about their experiences of using existing library spaces, and to gather their feedback on the proposed new Take a Break space we hoped to introduce in September 2026. Students could respond by unmuting themselves and speaking, adding comments to chat or adding comments to a 'Reflectors Padlet'.

We asked the students: What to your mind and your experience makes a library space welcoming? Responses included:

Student: Clean...Spacious....Bright (not dauntingly bright). Useful and available resources

Student: Staff around 24/7

Student: Consideration for a diverse set of students- access, clear signs, etc

Student: The quiet space in the library makes it welcoming for me

Student: Its open 24hrs, so we can go anytime we need

Student: I'd say reassurance, especially at night

Student: A variety of comfortable spaces, tailored to the different reasons people might use it (eg solo work, collaborative study, reading spaces, distinct areas) and staff who are willing to help if there are any problems with those spaces

Student: With some background noise works for me.

Student: First of all, Smiling faces at the help desk and reception makes it welcoming! Coming to the spaces I believe it depends on the current view you have for getting work done! For example if I want to lock in I would very much prefer quiet space, if I want to be in an online meet, I might book a room rather than being in any part of the Library. In all, the library does accommodate all needs.

Student: An idea I've heard is maybe a chat where you can contact security in case anything is kicking off that wouldn't allow you to the main floor.

In the Reflectors padlet, we also got some comments on what was good and bad about the current library spaces, and some thoughts about what the students would like to see in the new Take a Break space.

Student: Good – 24/7 availability, easy booking, easy access to every service in the library, I can find my own space to work, security are friendly and helpful.

Student Bad – The noise, some students make a lot of noise talking and laughing loudly, sometimes they watch something on their computer with high volume. It would be a really good idea if we would have soundproof walls which will give us the full privacy and concentration to finish our work in peace. I normally spend most of my day in the library.



Student: I like private spaces, but not totally closed off

Student: It could be called a self-lounge and we could introduce sofas or lounge chairs when they really need a more relaxed break than a casual break away from the screen.



Student: I would prefer a resting area with colourful bean bags, surrounded by plants, with views of the outdoors. I also love the idea of a daily note board where students can interact and leave their thoughts, making the library feel more lively

Student: Books on mental health, meditation and mindfulness. LED coloured lights, one with remote to change their colour and brightness. Colouring books, paper and stationery. Speaker with music with headphones so people can have something to listen to without looking at a screen.

Student: Take a Break space sounds like a great idea. I think it is easy to get overwhelmed when the library is crowded, and this would help...it would need to be somewhere that doesn't feel too far to get to, but also it'd need to be separate from more collaborative spaces.



Student: Mindfulness cards – they can be helpful to students who are feeling stressed or overwhelmed with the work they have to do.



Student: A mixture of resting chairs, bean bags and sofas. We can name this space as 'Calm Corner'. We can as well use the space to spread the resources available in the library for students

Student: We could make a seating rug available to students to spread out on if they wish to play with any resources in the space. It would be different to a carpet on the floor that everyone walks on – it would be a rug they spread out when they need it, not one that would be always on the floor



Post-Session Activity

After the session, students were asked to respond to several reflective questions in a workbook, which they emailed back to the library manager.

Q1. Based on your previous experience of using a library – what makes a library welcoming?

‘A welcoming library has specific spaces based on how you like to study...for example silent study areas, computer rooms and more relaxed rooms where people can work in groups. Good lighting, comfortable seating and a calm atmosphere.’

‘A welcoming space is where you feel comfortable and relaxed as soon as you walk in...good lighting makes a big difference, especially natural light as it helps to create a calm atmosphere.... comfortable seating is also really important, whether that’s desks for studying or sofas for taking a break’.

‘Having different areas for different needs ... like quiet zones for focus and other spaces where you can talk or work in groups’.

‘Clean spaces and small touches like plants or decorations can make the library feel less formal... a quiet work community feel ... lots of places to study. Places to eat and socialise with a respectful noise level ... lounge areas that are out of the way of study zones’.

‘A welcoming library space feels comfortable, inclusive and easy to navigate ... warm lighting, greenery and comfortable seating create an inviting area ... an open, uncluttered design help make the space feel approachable. A sense of community, seeing others reading, studying and relaxing adds to the overall atmosphere’

‘Overall, a good library feels like a shared space for focus, curiosity and rest rather than just a study hall’.

Q2. What is good/bad about the current library spaces?

‘The lighting in the library is calming and not too intense so you can focus well. There’s a wide range of areas you can work in: silent study areas and large table areas as well as computer rooms. The books are very organised so they’re easy to find and you can use the online library website to see if the book is available in the library’.

‘One of the good things about current library spaces is that there are different areas for different types of work. Quiet zones are helpful when you need to focus, and group spaces are useful for working with others. However, there are some negatives. It can be hard to find a seat during busy times, which can be frustrating. Sometimes noise levels are not well controlled, especially in areas that are meant to be quiet. Some of the seating is not very comfortable for long periods of time, which can make studying harder. Also, the overall atmosphere can feel quite stressful, especially during exams.’

‘Lots of good things ... It looks really tidy and visually appealing. I like all the wooden desks available which give a modern urban feel. Also, it was quite spaced out when I went where it wasn’t crowded. I like the new café that’s been added on floor 4. It’s simple yet effective. A little dark but still nice. For the bad sides. Now after the new refurb, there’s a lot of study space available ... Where half of the actual library bookshelves have been put in storage. So there’s less to browse through. I also have mixed feelings about the canteen (at the Collegiate Library) being replaced with more study space. It’s nice but there’s no general eating area now, so everyone is eating at the study desks. Which will inevitably lead to students leaving behind a mess.’

‘One of the best things about the current library spaces is the variety, they cater to different needs, from quiet individual booths to open social areas. The natural light and modern furniture create a positive environment that feels less institutional and more like a workspace you’d want to spend time in. However, during busy periods, finding free seating can be difficult, especially near plug sockets or in the silent zones. Some areas can

also feel quite sterile or too brightly lit, which isn't ideal for longer study sessions. Occasionally, noise from group areas drifts into quiet zones, which can be distracting. **More cozy, enclosed relaxation spaces or "break-out" zones would help balance the intensity of academic work.** Overall, the spaces work well but could be improved by adding more areas designed for rest and informal downtime.'

As a final activity, the student partners were asked to create a flyer to promote the new 'Take a break' space to students. This activity was especially helpful as it highlighted again not only their priority features for this type of space, but provided an insight into how to market and share the idea of the 'Take a break' space – even down to the name – with the wider student body.



THE RECHARGE ROOM

Your space to pause, breathe & reset



Feeling overwhelmed? Need a break?
Relax & recharge in **The Recharge Room** at Adsetts Library

-  Comfy Seating & Chill Zones
-  Peaceful, Green Environment
-  Charging Points for Your Devices
-  Low-Noise, Stress-Free Space

 Adsetts Library – 2nd Floor
Drop in Anytime – No Booking Needed



Take a break. Reset your mind. Come back stronger.

RECHARGE ROOM

Need a break? We've got you.



University can be intense.
This space is here to help **you pause, reset, and recharge** — without pressure.

-  Comfortable seating
-  Calm, low-stimulation space
-  No pressure to study
-  Open to all students

 Located in the Library
 Drop in anytime

Take a break.
You'll work better after it.

Because reading the same sentence 10 times isn't a strategy.

RELAXATION NOOK!

GETTING STRESSED WHILST STUDYING?
COME TO THE RELAXATION NOOK IN THE LIBRARY!

LOCATION: ADSETT AND COLLEGIATE LIBRARY

PROMPTS BY OTHER STUDENTS THAT YOU CAN WRITE IN FOR MOTIVATION!

life's tough
take a break

COMFY BEANBAGS

MINDFULNESS CARDS

Relax



TIRED? WE GET IT!




UNI LIFE IS DIFFICULT...
TAKE A BREAK!




New 'Take a Break' Space NOW OPEN!

A new Library Lounge space has recently been added for you to enjoy.

Bring your friends. Socialise.
And take that much needed break!



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Conclusion and implementation - Huddersfield

It was clear from the data gathered during this project that the Calm Zone is a valued area of the Library and is meeting the needs of many of the students who use it. However, there are some aspects of the area which are not fit for purpose in the eyes of all students and there are some small but important changes which need to be made.

Quick wins

It was decided that many of the small items which students said they would like to see added to the Calm Zone would be easy and cost-effective to purchase. We have now bought a small collection of colouring books, fidget toys, individual games, jigsaws and puzzles, together with a storage unit to contain them. We have taken steps to minimise the risk of theft by adding security tags to items where possible so that they would set off the alarm if anyone tried to remove them from the library and they have been stickered as university property.

To combat the “waiting room” layout criticised by some students, we have added a new comfy swivel chair, a beanbag and some floor cushions. To make room for these pieces of furniture and for the new storage unit, we have removed a couple of armchairs. It was decided by the library management team that a low-cost approach to providing dimmable lighting was needed, so two of the LED strips have been removed from the Calm Zone and two dimmable lamps with a choice of light tones have been purchased. Further feedback on lighting will be gathered in the winter when there is less natural light in the space.

Signage to tell students that books are available to borrow is another quick win, and the comments about dying plants suggested that a better system for ensuring that the plants get watered was also needed – this has now been implemented.



The Calm Zone after the research project with additional resources for recreation and relaxation in a new unit, cushions and beanbags.

We hope that the swivel chair will also provide a degree of privacy when needed, as it can be turned away from the centre of the room. The removal of several armchairs gives the zone a more relaxed atmosphere, making it feel more like a domestic space and less like a waiting room.



Some students requested sensory items to promote mindfulness “like a lava lamp”. It wasn’t possible to provide one of those, but these bubble sensory toys will hopefully provide a similar experience.



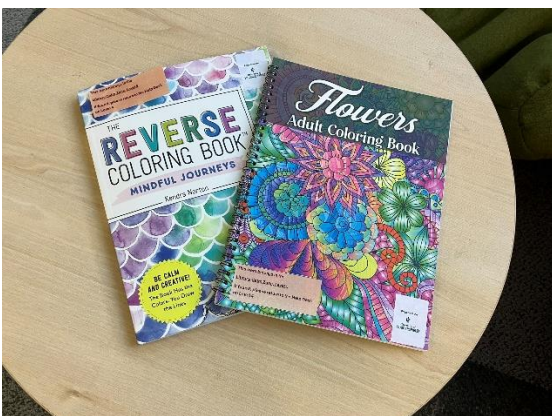
Some other sensory toys now available for users of the Calm Zone.



New 200-piece jigsaws were purchased on the advice of students who took part in the research as larger jigsaws take too long to complete. We also added a couple of one player games such as A Gentle Rain.



New colouring and reverse colouring books are now available to use.



Longer term issues to consider

The main exception in terms of ease of implementation is the idea of dividers or screens to create zones and increase privacy, given the size of the Calm Zone and the likely cost of potential solutions. Another recent development which is relevant here is that the need for sensory rooms on campus has recently been put forward as a “Big Idea” by the SU’s Disabled Students Network. The Library would be an ideal place to host a sensory room. I feel that the findings of this project, especially the mention by several neurodivergent students

of a desire for more privacy to manage their disability and lower/more adjustable lighting also support the desirability of establishing one here. As this would be an expensive facility to introduce, it is currently on the list of things we would like to do in the future if and when we can fund it.

Conclusion and proposed next steps for action – Sheffield Hallam

The student partner event and research continued to show a positive response to the library as a place to study, and particularly an appreciation and demand for the spaces that are unique to the Hallam Library.

Within the feedback we continued to see recommendations for more bespoke and softer spaces, and to introduce spaces that are functionally and philosophically different from 'formal academic study spaces'.

Next steps

Sheffield Hallam University Library will continue with the creation of the 'Take a break' space concept, supported by the research and feedback. The panel activities provided a refined list of priorities for the space, including task/adjustable lighting, biophilia, and opportunities for privacy.

- The aim is to finalise and open the new space ready for the 26/27 academic year. Continue with the implementation of the Take a Break space in readiness for September, incorporating the feedback received during the event where possible.
- Once the 'Take a break' space opens, we will undertake observations to both monitor the uptake and to see if the usage of the space is as intended.
- 6-12 months after beginning operation, the new space will be fully reviewed as part of our continuous service improvement.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to all the students who generously gave their time and views on our Calm Spaces, also to Jackie Knowles at the University of York, Lee Border at the University of Chester and Kate Williamson and Katharine Davidson Brown at Durham University who shared their own spaces and insights with us. We are also grateful to Matthew Theaker (Sheffield Hallam), Jessica Burnand-Martin and Chris Beevers (Huddersfield) for their input into the project.

Kate McGuinn and Julia King, July 2026