Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

Evaluation of Audio Interpretation With Visually Impaired Audience

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2.0 Overall Summary

Please note that most of the audio interpretation evaluated in this report with visually impaired visitors, has not been designed specifically for this audience. However, the issues and suggestions will be useful for audio interpretation development.

The evaluation demonstrates that the audio interpretation at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery has limited success in engaging with Visually Impaired people (VIPS). Although the content was generally found to be engaging, the delivery methods adopted, lack of signage and placement of the audio proved problematic for the VIPS.

The most popular audio interpretation for VIPS is in Glasgow Stories Gallery, Violence Against Women, as the group found this the easiest to locate with the best sound delivery system using overhead speakers, and they found the content of interest to them.

The audio designed for VIPS in Scotland’s First People Gallery proved unpopular with the group. Most could not understand the purpose of the audio within the space and failed to make meaning of the audio in relation to the objects on display. A number of negative comments were made about the delivery method as they felt that “listening” to a picture made them feel “like an idiot”.

The key issues identified, and suggested solutions, are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Suggested solution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The use of headsets is unpopular as it blocks out all other sound leaving the VIP feeling isolated, constricted and anxious.</td>
<td>Where individual listening is necessary, single earpieces should be used to allow interaction with rest of the museum environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIPS are unable to locate audio that requires interaction to listen e.g. push buttons, lifting headsets etc.</td>
<td>Tactile flooring or signage, plus colour-coding to indicate audio to the VIP. (Not all VIPS are blind, many are able to distinguish colours)</td>
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<td>When audio is placed too close to each other, VIPS loose concentration, as they are unable to focus on just one.</td>
<td>Ensure all audio interpretation is spaced reasonably apart from each other, or provide a mechanism to “separate” audio to avoid noise bleed. Further evaluation should be carried out to determine criteria of audio overlap for VIPS.</td>
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<td>“Listening to pictures” was very unpopular with the group as it made them feel “like an idiot”.</td>
<td>The group would prefer ambient sound to be just that, all around them rather than requiring them to actively seek out where the audio comes from and having to stand so close to hear it.</td>
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<td>The group all thought the use of overhead speakers provided the best audio delivery. This was despite background noises in the gallery.</td>
<td>This location of the overhead speakers in KG should be taken into consideration with this, as the space is partly contained. Caution and design solutions will be required with Riverside to avoid noise bleed e.g. “listening bubbles”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In some instances, the VIPs commented on the audio being too quiet. This was especially problematic with La Faruke due to the confined space creating echoes.</td>
<td>Where appropriate, turn the volume up. Further consultation should be taken to determine appropriate levels of sound for Riverside. Suggest further evaluation to test if visitors with a hearing impairment experience a similar opinion.</td>
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<td>The audio description of the paintings in La Faruke was very successful with the VIPs as they were able to visualise the paintings.</td>
<td>Where appropriate for Riverside, use audio to describe objects in detail. This should be especially considered for stories targeted to sensory impaired audiences.</td>
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<td><strong>General Comments on KG</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Braille guides are provided at KG but they are very large and difficult to use whilst moving around the museum.</td>
<td>The use of hand-held audio guides to provide interpretive content and navigation was a favoured solution for VIPs. The audio guides could be devised to include different levels of information to provide for other audiences e.g. non-English speakers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Navigation around the museum was difficult for the entire group, made more difficult due to the lack of tactile flooring. All commented that they would not be able to visit on their own. The flooring provided no markers for their sticks.</td>
<td>Audio guides with directions for a hi-tech solution. A low-tech solution is to provide trained guides for VIP groups. Tactile trails, where VIPs are provide with gloves to allow touching the objects on displays.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The toilets do not have tactile signs to indicate male or female. Infrared sensors control the water with no indication to a VIP that they are there.</td>
<td>Provide tactile signage.</td>
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3.0 Introduction

The primary aim of this research was to evaluate the audio interpretation at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery with visitors with visually impairments (VIPS). The research will provide valuable data for the development of audio interpretation for the Riverside Project.

A focus group of VIPS was recruited from Visibility, a charity working by “listening and responding to people affected by sight loss in the West of Scotland”.

The results of this research will be combined with the other evaluation undertaken focusing on all visitors and their interaction with the audio interpretation taken place in June/July 2007.

4.0 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the research was to consult with a group of VIPS for feedback and comment on their experience as visitors to Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery.

The specific aims of the research was to:

- To identify if the audio interpretation meets the needs of people with visual-impairements.
- To test the different methods of audio delivery for strengths and weaknesses.
- To find out if the audio helps the audience to make meaning of the interpretation on display.

Each of these objectives was explored in only a number of galleries featuring audio interpretation, the galleries and the audio interpretation selected where:

1. Glasgow Stories- Violence Against Women
2. Glasgow Stories- I Belong to Glasgow
3. French Art- La Faruke Madonna
4. Scottish Art in Identity- Robert Burns Poems
5. Scotland’s First People- Ambient Sound Walls
5.0 Methodology

The methodology selected was a focus group of VIPS recruited through Visibility, a charity working with VIPS in the West of Scotland. The Go! Co-ordinator at Visibility was responsible for recruiting the participants with the remit to recruit with a variety of age groups and levels of vision as possible.

The focus group lasted 2.5 hours and took place on the morning on the 10th July. The group was met by facilitators on the lower ground floor of the museum and escorted to the lecture theatre for an explanation of the session and introductions.

The focus group consisted of Visibility staff to act as guides and VIPS, both with mixture of visual ability:

Participants

- 3x Blind Females
- 1 x Blind Male
- 1x Sighted Female
- 1x Severely Visually Impaired Male
- 2 x Visually Impaired Male

Staff

- 1x partially sighted female (Go! Co-ordinator)
- 2x sighted males
- 2x sighted females

Facilitators

- Visitor Studies Curator
- Visitor Research Assistant

Session Plan

The session began with introductions and some ice-breakers to find out who everyone was. The questions asked were designed to find out any prior knowledge of Kelvingrove and help the participants feel relaxed:

- Name
- Have you been to been to Kelvingrove before?
- Tell us what your favourite museum or visitor attraction is and why?

The purpose of the session was explained along with any issues we did not want the participants to dwell upon, Kelvingrove is a very large museum and they have limited time to explore the galleries.

The group was then divided into three smaller groups by the Go! Co-ordinator, each with at least one sighted guide. The guide was then provided with a map that identified the galleries to be visited and a prompt sheet. The map was used to
provide a route around the museum to avoid two groups going to the same gallery
at the same time. The prompt sheet was designed to help the guides to take notes
during the visit for feeding back during the discussion.

It should be noted that the groups were told that in each of these galleries, there
was audio interpretation; however, it was not made explicitly clear what or where
this interpretation was to be found.

The groups were given 1 hour to explore the galleries, during this time the
facilitators tried to spend time with them to capture spontaneous reactions. However, this proved harder than expected due to the size of Kelvingrove.

The group then returned to the lecture room for an in-depth discussion. The
discussion was recorded and transcribed. A copy of the full transcription is
available on request.
6.0 Findings

The results of the focus group are reported below, starting with the ice-breakers prior to the gallery visit. When presenting the gallery discussions, these are presented by audio interpretation in each gallery. It should be noted that, where appropriate, results from previous research is included, in particular, consultation with the Access Panel carried out in October 2006.

6.1 Introductions and Ice-Breakers

In order to gauge their prior know of the museum, they where asked if they had visited Kelvingrove before. The majority had been to Kelvingrove but only as a child, with most commenting that they haven’t been since refurbishment.

Only 2 said they had been since it re-opened and both where disappointed.

“I loved it as a child when I could see, now as an adult I find it harder to relate to new displays and layout”. (female, blind)

Only 1 person, had never been to Kelvingrove, and said she expected it to be boring.

Moving onto their favourite museum/visitor attraction, 3 said that the Museum of Transport (MOT) was their favourite. [It should be noted that until now, they where unaware of the facilitators' role on the Riverside project. Infact, all where unaware of the new Riverside Museum Project.] The reason why they all liked MOT was:

“I can touch the exhibits there”. (Male, partially sighted)

Apart from one other mentioning his liking for the Viking Experience in York, as “it has lots of interactive experiences” (male, blind) the other failed to claim a preference for one as they had visited too many to decide or that they don’t visit museums very often.

6.2 Glasgow Stories- Violence against Women

The space is self-contained, with partitions and walk-throughs into rest of gallery. There are three large floor-standing cases with what appears to be random “house-hold” objects with no other interpretation. The stories are told by women who refer to the objects as having significance to their experiences/lives/stories.

The audio is delivered via overhead speakers, mounted above each case. During the audio, lights automatically come on in the case to highlight the objects associated with the narrative of each woman. The audio is on a loop, users can either engage by standing to listen, or walk-through the space. The audio loop moves from one case to the next automatically.

NB- this was designed with overhead speakers to encourage visitors to engage with a difficult subject. Using headphones would offer the visitor a choice.
Although two of the three groups visited this gallery, only group 1, managed to spend time at this audio. The other two did not have time as they had started on the first floor.

On Gallery Comments

This was the first audio that the group 1 found when they went into the gallery. They caught the end of the panel to the right, and then the sound shifted and moved to the far left panel. As the sound shifted, participants identified that the audio was coming from a different place and went to find it. Some thought that the sound must be operated on a sensor, and therefore tried to move around underneath the speaker (assuming that this was where a sensor was located) to get the audio to restart. Once directed by facilitator to the correct panel they stood and listened to some of the stories.

Group Discussion

The initial reaction from those who listened to this audio was positive:

“Those were really good.” (Female, partially sighted)

Those were good”. (Male, visually impaired)

With regards to the delivery of the sound, the group who listened to this audio liked the overhead speakers and the sound quality.

“And of all the speaker attractions, those were the most clear in terms of being able to hear them, even though that was the busiest gallery we were in they were very, very clear. Quite disturbing, but clear.” (Female, partially sighted)

“Yes, of all the speakers above you in the entire museum, they were the clearest. (Male, visually impaired)

“At one stage there was a lot of noise, there were about six kids running about sliding on the floor at that point, there were lots of things going on.” (Female partially sighted)

“And even then we could still hear it” (male, visually impaired)

The content seemed to engage the group as they listened to a number of the stories:

“I think we listened to four or five of the stories. (Male, visually impaired)

“The ashtray, the keys, the jumper, the bottle of whisky, the knife.” (Female, partially sighted)

Although Group 2, went into this gallery, they did not encounter this audio. Through the discussion it became apparent that they had seen the display but hadn’t heard the audio, as it was not playing as they passed through the space.
The audio was missed because it is on a timer and loop and there is nothing else to tell them it was there.

"We saw it, but we didn’t hear any description". (Male, sighted)

"Because they only talk on timers". (Female, blind)

The results demonstrate partial success for this audio, proving popular with the one group who had engaged with it. The overhead speakers were liked by the group as an affective delivery mechanism providing good levels of sound, despite a noisy gallery. However, it should be noted that one group missed the audio altogether due to the timing of the loop. A tactile sign to indicate audio in the space would rectify this, e.g. tactile flooring in a distinct colour.

6.3 Glasgow Stories- I Belong to Glasgow

The space is self-contained, with partitions and walk-throughs into rest of gallery. The audio is located on the side of three low-level free-standing cases. Each case contains an object, with text and graphic interpretation about the person it belongs to, accompanied by an audio narrative by the person who owned the object.

The audio is delivered through a set of **head-phones** located to the right-hand side of each case. The audio is on a loop. There is one set of headphones per case.

NB- originally designed to have selector buttons. Each audio consists of 3 short (45 second) stories with pause between each one.

Two of the three groups listened to this audio.

**On- Gallery Comments**

After Group 1 had listened to Violence Against Women, the facilitator suggested to them that there was other audio in this area and asked them to find it.

They went straight into the I Belong to Glasgow area but totally missed the headphones including the sighted guide, and carried out searching through the gallery. Once they had been everywhere, the facilitator had to explain where the audio actually was and the group went back to listen. One participant asked the guide not away because once the headphones were on he would be totally isolated.

**Group Discussion**

The initial reaction to the Glasgow Stories gallery was interesting, with 2 participants from both groups noticing a smell. (It should be noted that there is no smells in this gallery, and facilitator suggested smell was coming from the outside).
“Excuse me, I felt there was a smell of soot when we started off there, and that was quite good, it gave you a bit of atmosphere, the way Glasgow used to be…” (female, blind)

Of the two groups that went into this gallery, no one in either group was able to locate the headphones for themselves.

“Of all the groups we were probably the most sighted, and we walked straight past them, we walked round and round and Vicky eventually told us where they were.” (Female, partially sighted)

“We walked round them at least twice” (male, blind)

Once the participants had identified the headphones, they did not react well to them. The overall consensus was that headphones are unsatisfactory method for delivering audio.

“I didn’t like those at all, they were too bulky. You feel constricted.” (Male, visually impaired)

“They make you feel isolated I felt.” (Female, partially sighted)

“They do block out too much sound from the rest of the things. A better thing could be something you just put up to one ear.” (Male, visually impaired)

“There’s also a health and safety type thing with the padding of the earphone going from person to person to person, I’m surprised that they’d be hygienic, I was surprised that they were even there.” (Male, sighted)

“What would be a good idea would be a stop and start button, because when you lifted the earphones up it could be in the middle of something, so you don’t know what they’re talking about until you’ve listened to it all.” (Male, severely visually impaired)

There was some discussion regarding ways to let visually impaired people know where headphones available. It was stressed by one participant that tactile signage would be helpful, for example tactile flooring. However, the discussion lead to other alternatives to headphones, especially the use of audio guides. Most of the participants had experiences of using them and liked them as a way to navigate a space and to engage with the subject.

“…. If you had one earpiece in your ear so you could have conversation as well, and it could have instructions like ‘at the desk turn right and go to room such and such, on the left you will find…” It would be as if you had a person with you.” (Female, blind)

Facilitator: “do you mean an audio guide”?

“Yes, but it could take you round, tell you where to go, and would give you an audible bleep when you went into the room.” (Female, blind)
“….Now what you could also do is instead of having to be able to read the
sign, you have it triggered by infra-red, so it would automatically trigger that
recording at that particular stage by infra-red remote control rather than
press a button”. (Male, severely visually impaired)

“The advantage of the old cassette was that when I was a guide I could still
talk to the person and they could stop and start at their pace rather than
me feeling like I was under any pressure to take them round so many
things in an allocated time. (Female, sighted guide)

With regards to the content, the group generally where happy with it although the
focus of the conversation remained with the delivery mechanism.

“Well I think that when they were talking about things, obviously the audio I
feel is not designed for visually impaired people, it’s just designed as an
extra, it’s more of an interactive for people who are sighted, I didn’t feel it
was designed at all for visually impaired people.” (Female, partially
sighted)

“I found the accent too strong, so you really had to concentrate on the
accent as well as the information you were getting.” (Male, blind)

The results demonstrate that headphones on individual audio failed to engage with the VIP audience. All where unable to locate the headsets, as there was nothing in the gallery to indicate audio was available to them, tactile signage is required. If headsets are to be used then it should be delivered through a single earpiece, with tactile signage. The ability to control the audio is preferable, as initially designed. Overall, the entire group agreed that an audio guide for the museum would be their preferred option, as it would allow them the freedom to listen as they moved around the museum.

6.4 French Art- La Faruke Madonna

La Faruke Madonna is located in a distinct space (chamber) at the end of the
French Art Gallery. The space has interpretation on the right-hand sidewall, with
the paintings displayed on the wall opposite to the entrance.

The audio is delivered through overhead speakers, on a loop. As the narrative
progresses, lights turn on and off to draw the visitor’s attention to elements of
interpretation/paintings referred to in the text.

NB- there is no seating in the space; however, there would be room for some.
Audio lasts 4mins and 40 seconds.

One group did not make it to this gallery.

On- Gallery Comments

Group 1 found the chamber easily enough. They arrived just at the end of a loop
and so waited for it to restart. One participant commented that the man’s voice
was easier to hear than the man’s voice on the Burns audio. The facilitator was asked why the light for the paintings kept going up and down; the group seemed to find it confusing. About two thirds of the way through the audio, the Dufy interactive located in the main French Art Gallery was used by a family, and the group immediately found the noise distracting, to the point that they stopped listening to the audio and left the area.

**Group Discussion**

The groups who visited this gallery had mixed views about it. In general, they liked the fact that the sound was contained within a small space as it made it easier to hear; however, there were a number of issues identified as well with background noise proving problematic for the sound level of the audio.

“The sound was a bit better because it was in a smaller room, but you still had to be very quiet, if someone spoke you couldn’t hear it, you lost the conversation.” (Female, blind).

“I went in first before the rest arrived and I was listening to it, the heavy accent was slightly too strong, but the echoes in the corridor and the room destroyed my concentration…so I lost what I was actually listening to at the time” (male, visually impaired)

“There’s another problem there, there’s a little thing for kids where if you put your head through it, it starts talking, and the two started overlapping and you couldn’t listen to one over the other.” (Female, blind)

On the positive, the participants liked the descriptions of the paintings and when prompted, said that they could visualise them.

“In fairness, the description was lovely and it was the first time that I’ve ever had a painting described to me audibly, and it was lovely.” (Female, blind)

“The description there was really good, it was describing the paintings and he was telling you what was on the paintings and things.” (Female, partially sighted)

The other significant issue for the group was the lighting, which dips up and down during the narrative to highlight one of the paintings or a part of the painting.

“But the problem was the paintings were only lit at certain times, so he would be saying something and we would go to look, and then the painting would go dark….. I didn’t realise there were pictures, and Andrew said they were all lit up a minute ago, and now they’ve all gone dark….

“If they were just lit all the time then that would be better, because certainly most people with any degree of visual impairment need longer to look, most people with visual impairment couldn’t take in a full painting all in one go, whether they’ve got central vision or side vision they would have to have time to look for something like that.” (Female, partially sighted)
The results demonstrate that although the content of the audio was engaging and interesting to the group, a number of issues need to be addressed. The Dufy interactive placed directly outside the doorway, causes an overlap of noise resulting in a lack of concentration, this would be better located at the opposite end of the gallery. The sound level should be slightly louder as participants commented on it being a bit quiet for them. And finally, if possible, the gallery and paintings need to have more lighting to give the VIPS time to look at them whilst listening to the audio.

6.5 Scottish Identity in Art – Robert Burns Poems

This audio is in-bedded within the interpretation. There is a panel with speakers and buttons attached to a text panel that omits the sound into the gallery.

Visitors have three options to choice from, each with a small push button: one poem and two songs. They can listen whilst looking at the rest of the display relating to Robert Burns. This audio requires interaction from the visitor by pushing a button.

All three groups listened to this audio.

On-Gallery Comments

As group 1 moved towards the area where the audio is located, another visitor activated it (song, female voice). They moved to the audio after that, although one participant commented and everyone agreed that there was no chance that they would have found it otherwise. Two participants were standing further back from the audio and complained that the man’s voice was hard to hear. One participant commented that women’s voices in general were easier to hear because of the higher pitch.

Group 2 did not locate the audio without assistance from their sighted guide. One participant needed help to find the push buttons, he commented that they were too small and too far apart. All commented that the sound was too quiet as they stood and listened.

Group Discussion

Similarly to the “I belong to Glasgow” audio with headsets, the group where unable to locate the audio without assistance. There is nothing in the gallery to indicate to a VIP that it is there.

“We found it, but it was singing at the time, I don’t think we’d have found it without that.” (Female, blind)

Once the group was aware of the interactive audio, they commented that the buttons to activate the sounds were difficult to use due to the size and the distance they are apart form each other.
“If you’d pushed one button, you could feel around it and you wouldn’t touch another button.” (Male, visually impaired)

“The buttons were too spaced out. Braille would help, as would pause and start and stop. (Male, blind)”

A number of participants commented that the sound was quite quiet, especially the poems, although they generally felt that the song was loud enough.

“It was fine for myself.” (Male, blind)

“The singing was good, but the two poems that were being read out could have done with being louder, you had to be quite close to hear it well.” (Male, visually impaired)

The results demonstrate that a number of issues for VIPS. As we have seen previously, there is nothing to indicate to a VIP that there is audio within this gallery, this can rectify with tactile signage. The buttons on the panel need to be larger and closer together to indicate that there is more than one option to press. The sound quality of the audio should be improved to allow visitors to hear it as a group without having to stand very close.

6.6 Scotland’s First People- Ambient Sound Walls

This audio is delivered within a large gallery, designed specifically for the visually impaired audience. There are four very large panels against one wall, covered with a large graphic image e.g. landscape.

Within the panels are speakers, which provide the audio. The audio is a combination of sounds and voices to provide a sound effect to the stories featured in the gallery:

1. First people- picture of trees. Sounds of trees rustling, animal noises etc.
2. Living on water- picture of loch and crannog. Sounds of water, birds etc.
3. Death & Burial- picture of fire. Sounds of burning wood with a story.
4. Vikings- picture of landscape. Women’s voice telling a story, noises of living e.g. domestic animals, human noises e.g. Dog barking, coughing, baby crying etc.

The aims of the sound walls are to create an evocative introduction the story theme to encourage discovery of objects etc.

NB- designed to encourage visitors to listen by putting ears against the panel. Originally designed to have handling objects near-by. Audio length is 1.5 minutes each.

All three groups visited this gallery.
On-Gallery Comments

One participant’s initial reaction was ‘hmmm, not sure’. Two participants stated that they felt quite stupid standing listening to a picture.

Group Discussion

The initial reaction from the entire group was that they were aware of the sound in the gallery.

“As soon as you walked in you were aware of the sound, yes, you could definitely hear it.” (Female, blind)

“Well I zoomed in a bit because of the birds, I went ‘oh, there’s the birds, let’s go this way” (Male, visually impaired)

However, the gallery prompted various discussions and comments with regards to the delivery of the sound. In particular, the way is has been designed to encourage visitors to “listen” the picture was not popular with the group.

“Well I felt really daft standing there, I thought everyone was thinking ‘look at that poor blind girl listening to that picture, she doesn’t know what she’s doing’.” (Female, partially sighted)

“You felt like an idiot sounding so close to those pictures.” (Male, visually impaired)

The group was then asked what they thought of the stories in relation to the objects in the galleries to find out if they could make the connections. Most struggled to make any connections except for with the “fire” (death & burial story) panel.

“There’s nothing to explain what it’s supposed to be and what it relates to, it’s so confusing because you have to make the link yourself, and when you can’t hear properly it’s hard.” (Female, blind)

“See, that was the thing, I didn’t really associate the noise with what was there, well once we got to the fire one I realised what it was talking about, but by that time we’d missed two so we’d completely missed the display related to the pictures.” (Female, blind)

“There was lots of pottery, so we kind of guessed the kiln.” (Male, visually impaired)

“The noises are nice, but…” (Female, blind) … “Pointless.” (Male, blind)

“I don’t know [what the story was about] because all I could hear was fire. You could only hear the fire.”
The level of the sound in the gallery proved frustrating for the group. They struggled to separate the noises between some of the panels, especially the one nearest the Artic Lives Object Theatre. Most felt that the sounds were too low to really hear them.

“They’re so quiet you really have to get close to them. (Female, blind)

“The only one we could hear properly was the fire one” (male, visually impaired)

“I think that only happened with the last one. The gallery next door was more interfering than each picture was interfering with each other” (male, blind)

“And it was quite quiet today, imagine what it would be like if it was really crowded, you wouldn’t have much chance of actually hearing anything”. (Female, blind)

[Comments from the Access Panel Consultation, October 2006, re-iterated this concern, with a number of participants observing the difficulty with the sound e.g. “the audio sound is poor and of no use to anyone with hearing impairments; there is a natural conflict with the noises within the gallery”.]

The results demonstrate that although designed with VIPs in mind, the group identified a number of issues with the gallery. They did not like the idea that you had to “listen” to pictures; they would have preferred the ambient sound to be just that, noise delivered throughout the space. The group failed to make the connections between the sound walls and the objects, it was suggested that perhaps the audio walls should be placed closer to the objects rather than free-standing, as was initially intended with the handling objects. The audio itself was too quiet for most of the group, most felt that the space was too large for this type of audio, which will need to be carefully considered within Riverside, where there will be no separate galleries.
7.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The evaluation has provided an opportunity to obtain visitor feedback from the visually impaired audience, focusing on their experience at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery. It should be highlighted that most of audio interpretation evaluated in this report, has not been designed specifically for this audience. However, their thoughts and comments should provide useful when developing audio for VIPs.

The report has established that VIPs do not like audio that blocks out the awareness of their surroundings. If individual listening is required, then it should always be delivered through a single earpiece.

All audio should be highlighted to VIPs in some way, this can be backed up with a previous consultation with the ACCESS Panel in October 2006, when it was commented that audio should be identified with signs. This can be achieved in a number of ways: through tactile signage, tactile flooring near the audio, or colour-coded signage e.g. a yellow box around the audio. The best solution would be combination of coloured, tactile flooring and signage. Another suggested alternative is using hi-tech solutions e.g. handheld audio guides that can be triggered by infrared as the VIP walks through gallery spaces.

The most popular mechanism for audio delivery was through overhead speakers. This allowed the VIPS to listen to the audios while aware of their surroundings. All agreed that despite other noises, when the sound level was right, it produced the easiest audio to listen to.

Audio guides should be considered for Riverside Museum. All agreed that these were very useful. This can be backed up with other research commissioned by RNIB as part of their Talking Images Research,

“Improving access: audio guides gave the experience of users in terms of the accessibility of technology used, descriptions on the guides, orientation information and quality of recordings. These findings illustrate that when done well, an audio guide can be an excellent way to improve access for visitors with sight problems. Just because a guide is in audio, however, does not necessarily mean that it will be accessible to blind and partially sighted people. Inaccessible technology, badly written descriptions, poor recording quality or added acoustic features made for frustrating visits. 63% of those surveyed said that audio guides here very helpful or helpful.”

Museums, galleries and heritage sites: improving access for blind and partially sighted people, 2003.

The gallery designed specifically with VIPs as the target audience, has proved how difficult it is to achieve visitor satisfaction despite previous consultation during development.

The group really did not like “listening” to the pictures in Scotland’s First People Gallery, as it drew attention to them and made them “feel like an idiot”. It was also highlighted that by listening to the pictures, you were unable to look at them and make the links between the two. The group all felt that if the objects had been
placed nearer to the panels, then there would be better chance for you to make connections.