



# Do we need 3D Audio Description Guidelines?

Recommendations from Focus Group Study

Report published: 25 February 2011

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## **Acknowledgments**

**Thanks to all the workshop participants and RNIB staff, who advised on the project and gave their comments and suggestions.**

**With special thanks to Sony Europe for the loan of the 3D television, 3D Blu-ray player, 3D glasses and 3D transmitter.**

ISBN 978-1-4445-0100-1

# **Executive Summary**

## **Introduction**

Audio description (AD) is an additional commentary to a film or television programme describing body language, facial expressions and action. It gives blind and partially sighted people information about the on screen action enabling them to follow what is happening. It takes away the dependence of relying on someone else to fill in the gaps. AD is an access service that is widely available and relied upon by blind and partially sighted people in the same manner as subtitles are relied upon by deaf and hard of hearing people.

The success of 3D cinema and the launch of 3D televisions and 3D programming in the UK prompted RNIB to hold facilitated focus group discussions with blind and partially sighted people to find out whether they felt 3D visual effects should be incorporated into the AD of a film or television programme. The results of these focus group discussions would then be fed back to the industry and, if necessary, the Ofcom Best Practice Guidelines should be reviewed to reflect the findings.

## **Main results**

- Blind and partially sighted participants expressed the overwhelming opinion was that it was not necessary to incorporate the 3D visual effect into the AD. Reasons given for this included that they felt the existing AD gave them sufficient information to imagine the scene and that 3D is just a visual effect which does not affect the storyline.
- The 3D visual effect came out as a very low priority in the order of preference for what should be audio described in a film or TV programme. The majority of participants generally agreed that the 3D was slightly more important than the reading of the film credits. Some participants felt it was more important to know who the film producer was than to have 3D effects described and put it at the bottom of the priority list.
- Description of the 3D visual effect may be beneficial if you are a blind parent of sighted children enabling you to share their experience and have the ability to censor unsuitable frightening scenes.

- 100% of participants felt that the 2D audio description for the film or TV programme was adequate for both the 2D and 3D version.

## **Recommendations**

- Based on the findings of this project it is recommended that description of 3D visual effects is not incorporated into audio description for 3D TV programmes and films
- No special guidelines are required
- The report findings should be circulated to audio description providers, UK film distributors and broadcasters
- The report should be sent to Ofcom and be taken into consideration when revising Ofcom's Best Practice Guidelines for Audio Description

## Contents page

1. Introduction .....	6
1.1 Background .....	6
1.2 Aims and objectives .....	7
2 Method .....	7
2.1 Design .....	7
2.2 Participants .....	7
Demographic information .....	8
Sight Conditions .....	8
How sight condition affects TV viewing.....	8
Extent of weekly TV viewing with AD .....	9
2.3 Materials.....	9
2.4 Procedure.....	9
3 Focus Group Findings .....	10
3.1 Focus Group Discussion - Session One.....	10
3.1.1 Prioritising information to be included in AD .....	10
3.1.2 Initial thoughts about 3D and audio description?.....	13
3.1.3 Advantages and disadvantages to having the 3D effects described .....	15
4. Group Presentation.....	16
4.1 Where 3D is now and where is it going? .....	16
4.2 Screening of 2D/3D Christmas Carol clip .....	16
5 Focus Group Discussion - Session Two .....	16
5.1 Impressions of 3D descriptions.....	16
5.2 Preferred information about visual effects .....	17
5.3 Required information about the visual effects .....	18
5.4 AD information they would be prepared to lose to accommodate 3D effects? .....	19
6. Group Presentation Two.....	21
6.1 How 3D works .....	21
6.2 Screening of 2D/3D Alice in Wonderland clip.....	21
7 Focus Group Discussion - Session Three.....	21
7.1 Any additional thoughts or change of opinion.....	21
7.2 Fitting 3D effects into priorities for AD .....	22
7.3 Preferences for 2D versus 3D AD .....	23
8 Group Presentation Three .....	24
8.1 What does the future hold for 3D .....	24
9 Conclusion .....	24
10 Recommendations.....	25
11 References.....	25
11 Appendices .....	26
11.1 Appendix 1.....	26

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is the leading organisation representing the interests of two million people living with sight loss in the UK. RNIB has research evidence that blind and partially sighted people rely on, and want to use, television as much as their sighted peers (Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey, 2006). This is why RNIB is concerned about the impact of all new TV developments on accessibility. 2010 marked the arrival of 3D televisions and programming in the UK and this prompted RNIB to hold focus group discussions with blind and partially sighted people to assess whether the current audio description (AD) guidelines should be amended to incorporate description of 3D effects.

AD is an additional commentary to a film or television programme describing body language, facial expressions and action. It gives blind and partially sighted people information about the on screen action enabling them to follow what is happening. It takes away the dependence of relying on a sighted person, such as a friend or family member, to fill in the gaps. AD is an access service that is widely available and relied on by blind and partially sighted people in the same manner as subtitles are relied on by deaf and hard of hearing people.

The Broadcasting Act 1996 required the television regulatory body - the Independent Television Commission (ITC) - to draw up, and from time to time review, a code giving guidance as to how digital programme services should promote the understanding and enjoyment of programmes by sensory impaired people including those who were blind and partially sighted (Broadcasting Act, 1996).

The Act required a minimum proportion of non-excluded programmes in a digital programme service to be accompanied by AD. To this end, the ITC provided guidance on standards for the production and presentation of AD.

The ITC Guidance on Standards was based upon extensive studies carried out between April 1992 and December 1995 by the European Audetel (Audio Described Television) consortium (Ofcom, 2000). The consortium undertook a thorough investigation of the

technical, artistic, logistic and economic issues associated with the provision of an optional descriptive commentary of television programmes to enhance their enjoyment by blind and partially sighted people. The AD should provide a carefully crafted description of actions, locations, body language and facial expressions which is inserted in the gaps between the normal programme dialogue.

The ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description remained unchanged until Ofcom reviewed them in 2006 when the Ofcom Code on Television Access Services published Best Practice Guidelines for Audio Description (Ofcom, 2006).

As changes in broadcasting occur – such as the increase in availability of 3D film and television content – it is necessary to review user needs in relation to AD. This study aimed to investigate the views of blind and partially sighted people with regards to the inclusion of 3D visual effects in AD, so as to inform Ofcom whether further changes to best practice guidelines may be required.

## **1.2 Aims and objectives**

This research aimed to explore the views of blind and partially sighted people around the inclusion of description of 3D visual effects in AD. The results of these focus group discussions would then be fed back to the industry and, if necessary, the Ofcom Best Practice Guidelines should be reviewed to reflect the findings.

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Design**

In order to understand the views and opinions of AD users on the subject of description of 3D effects, a qualitative approach was chosen for this research. Focus groups were used to allow discussions between users.

### **2.2 Participants**

Ten regular and enthusiastic users of AD were recruited as participants by RNIB's Media and Culture Department. These people were existing contacts known to be AD users. The 3D Audio Description Focus Group session was hosted at RNIB offices in London.

Background information about participants was collected prior to their taking part in the focus group sessions. This included: demographic information (age, gender); sight condition (self report); how sight condition affects TV viewing; and extent of weekly TV viewing with AD.

### **Demographic information**

- Three participants self reported as partially sighted and seven as blind
- Six had congenital sight problems whereas four had acquired sight loss
- Six participants were male and four female
- One participant was aged between 25-34; two between 35-44; two between 45-54; three between 55-64; one between 65-74 and one 85+

### **Sight Conditions**

Participants had a wide range of eye conditions affecting their sight

- Retinitis Pigmentosa - two participants
- Retinal problems - two participants
- Retinopathy of prematurity - one participant
- Nerve damage - one participant
- Stroke - one participant
- Rubella - one participant
- Macular dystrophy/Stargardt - one participant
- Monocular vision - one participant

### **How sight condition affects TV viewing**

- Five participants reported that they could not see anything on the TV screen
- Two participants reported having difficulty seeing the picture, fine detail and text on the TV screen and were unable to see the light of the TV screen
- One participant reported having difficulty seeing the picture, fine detail and text on the TV screen
- One participant reported having difficulty seeing fine detail and text on screen and were unable to see the light of the TV screen
- One participant reported having difficulty seeing the fine detail and text on the TV screen

## **Extent of weekly TV viewing with AD**

- Four participants watched around 20 hours of audio described television per week
- Two participants watched between 10-14 hours per week
- Three participants watched between 4-7 hours per week
- One participant only watched audio described films on DVD

## **2.3 Materials**

The film clips were presented to participants using:

Sony 40HX803 television

Sony S470 Blu-ray player

4 pairs of Sony 3D glasses

3D signal transmitter

The content used in the session was a 3 minute excerpt from Disney's "A Christmas Carol" and a similar length clip from Disney's "Alice in Wonderland".

## **2.4 Procedure**

RNIB felt it was crucial that the ten participants who took part in the 3 hour session were given both a historical and technical context to inform their focus group discussions. A presentation to all ten participants was given on the following subjects:

- The history of 3D and where it is now;
- How 3D works and
- What does the future hold for 3D?

The participants experienced excerpts from two films. Each film was first shown in 2D with the 2D AD followed by the same film clip in 3D with the 3D visual effects being explained 'live' to the group.

The ten participants were together for the 3D presentations and the film clip viewing sessions. They were split into two groups of five for the focus group discussions. Each focus group included partially sighted and blind participants and was led by a facilitator.

The facilitator of each focus group used a set topic guide (see Appendix 1).

## **3 Focus Group Findings**

### **3.1 Focus Group Discussion - Session One**

#### **3.1.1 Prioritising information to be included in AD**

The focus group discussion started with a warm up exercise where participants were asked to put eleven different elements of AD into order of importance. This exercise was informative in finding out which information matters to AD users and also gave participants an idea of the difficulties audio describers have in prioritising information in descriptions.

The eleven elements were as follows:

- Who is there? [John perches on the desk, Alice turns to Jack]
- What are they wearing? [sexy red blouse, smart black suit]
- What do they look like? [large nose, blonde hair, rotten teeth]
- How old are they? [young, middle-aged, teenager, thirty-something]
- Where are they? [At home, In the café, Outside the bank]
- What are they doing? [he lunges at her with the knife, she plummets, they kiss]
- What else is happening? [blood drips from the table-top, a rose petal slowly drifts to the floor]
- How are they doing it? [she recoils, he leans forward, she grimaces, he frowns]
- Film credits [director/actors' names]
- On screen information [Berlin 1945, 4 April 2002 - FBI Headquarters]
- Film genre [animation, black and white film]

#### **Final priority list:**

##### **1. What are they doing?**

All participants agreed that description of actions was the most important and essential for following the storyline.

- "Action scenes are always vital."
- "[What are they doing] is very important."
- "[What are they doing] it sets the scene."

##### **2. On screen information**

Participants agreed that on screen information was essential as it set the scene for film or programme.

- "[On screen information] is very important."

- "I think [on screen information is] very important because it's there for a reason."

### 3. How are they doing it?

Facial expressions and gestures were very important to participants, to understand the subtleties of the plot and personalities in the scene.

- "I think [how they are doing it is] very important. The subtle facial expressions and raising of eyebrows and glancing off to the side. All of that is what you miss when you can't see very well. It's the little minutiae of expressions..... They've just said something very serious to another character and then you see them smirk to themselves - that's really important."
- "When the facial expression is contradicting what they're saying - it's so important."
- "I'm grateful for every syllable of AD as I've spent most of my life watching films without knowing what's going on."

### 4. Where are they?

There was a slight disagreement on the importance of this option - the majority of participants felt it was not as important as actions, on screen information and facial expressions. However, one participant felt it was essential to describe scene changes to ensure he could keep up with the storyline.

- "[Where are they] Oh yes, because that's setting the scene."
- "I don't think [where they are] is as important as the actions. I think they should first say what they are doing rather than where they are."
- "I disagree entirely, I think scene changes are important."

### 5. What else is happening?

There was general agreement that this was also a very important feature of audio description giving essential plot information.

- "[What else is happening is] very important because it's the non-dialogue things which are most important and can be significant."
- "[What else is happening] - that's vital."

## 6. Who is there?

Participants felt this was important rather than very important because as long as characters spoke you knew they were in the scene. However if they were silent or eavesdropping then it was very important that they were mentioned.

- "I think [who is there] is important, especially if they don't say anything. If they say something it is more obvious that they are there."
- "Especially in soaps - people listening in ... you might not know who [is there]."
- "If you don't know who's there, it might impact on the plot."

## 7. How old are they?

Participants felt this was important but sometimes it was possible to judge by the voice of the character how old they were.

- "Sometimes you can tell from the voice [how old they are] - you know it's a child, if it's an old man you hear by the voice."
- "[How old they are is] important because you can't always tell how old someone is by their voice."
- "If there's no time I'm happy for [how old they are] to be left out."

## 8. What are they wearing?

Participants judged that it was not essential to know what people are wearing unless it was something unusual, particularly if it would be something other people would be talking about afterwards.

- "If there's a major wedding in a soap .....what people are wearing is what people talk about after .... like someone's wedding dress."
- "I used to watch the Morse series, it can be a bit tiresome to have the description of Morse - how he looks - every time."
- "[what they are wearing] helps you picture their personality."
- "I think [what they are wearing is] important for historical dramas."

## 9. What do they look like?

There was a slight disagreement amongst the participants - the majority felt what people look like was well down the list of priorities for AD, however some participants felt ethnicity should be included in a character's description.

- "[What they look like is] less important than some of the previous things you've said."

- "[What they look like is] very important and include ethnicity in that as well."

#### 10. Film credits

There was general agreement that film credits were a very low priority as far as AD was concerned.

- "[Film credits are] no more than important."
- "I'd rather they used the time for something else [than film credits]."
- "I'd rather listen to the music [than the film credits]."
- "I'd rather they used the time to set the scene - perhaps the opening scene - time is so valuable."

#### 11. Film genre

Participants generally agreed that film genre was the least important priority for AD, although some felt knowing the genre may affect their decision to watch the film.

- "[Film genre] doesn't bother me at all."
- "Chances are if you are going to watch it you're going to know what it is."
- "I would need to know that [film genre] first - black and white or animation because I might choose not to watch an animation."

In summary, participants thought that many aspects of information included in AD were important, particularly those which affected the storyline of the programme and which they would not be able to pick up simply through listening. Some types of information were considered less important such as information about the film credits and genre of the film. Details about characters such as their age and how they looked were deemed less important than what was happening in the story.

### **3.1.2 Initial thoughts about 3D and audio description?**

Participants were asked what their initial thoughts were about the idea of audio description and 3D content.

#### **3.1.2.1 Is 3D relevant to people who can't see it?**

Both blind and partially sighted participants were unsure what 3D meant in reality and how a purely visual experience could be interpreted and incorporated into the AD. Some reported having little interest in the 3D effects as they couldn't see them.

- "As I've never been able to see, I've never had a concept of 3D when it looks as if things are coming straight at you. So I was curious to see how they could be fitted in but ..... I would want all the other information."
- "To be totally honest, I had no idea how audio description and 3D would go together. So I was interested to come and see how it could possibly work and also to try and ensure that it didn't spoil the audio description that we currently do have. Because ..... it is very, very relevant to us watching the TV now and, to be honest, it is something I'm lost without."
- "I just felt that 3D is visual and we're going to just accept that it's something that we won't see and it's not something that's going to make a lot of difference to us and I feel that audio description we get at the moment is very, very good and they should carry on concentrating on that. If someone says there's arrows flying out of the screen - I'm not going to duck. It's meant for the sighted people."
- "I didn't think that the picture being in 3D would make any difference to me."

### **3.1.2.2 Sound is more important than visual effects**

Many blind or partially sighted people experience TV on a purely audio level. One participant highlighted that whilst they were not interested in the visual 3D effects, improvements to the sound of AD would be a benefit.

- "The only thing I would be really interested in is 3D sound - not the visual but the audio. The description could be 2D - the 3D is irrelevant to me. If the sound quality matched with the picture quality then that would make a big impact for me."

### **3.1.2.3 Don't want to sacrifice other information for 3D description**

There was concern that description of the 3D effects may affect the amount of space left available for the AD.

- "I wouldn't want to spend too much time on the description of the 3D effects if it takes away the levels of description."

- "I wouldn't want to sacrifice any of the action to describe the effect."

### **3.1.3 Advantages and disadvantages to having the 3D effects described**

Participants were asked "Can you think of any advantages or disadvantages to having the 3D effects described to you?"

#### **Advantages**

It was felt that description of the 3D effects may be useful if you were a blind or partially sighted parent of sighted children, as this would enable parents to monitor children's viewing and understand what their child was experiencing through the 3D visual effects.

- "Where you have children in the household - so you as a mother, as a father, - can share their enjoyment, the scariness on a scale of ten and you may even want to censor something because they're getting too scared. I can see that that could be a factor."
- "I do have children so sometimes you do want to know what's going on in these films because sometimes the children start talking about things and you have no idea what they are going on about. It would be nice for 3D from that point of view but I still can't quite work out how it's going to work."

#### **Disadvantages**

In general, participants expressed the view that 3D effects were purely visual and therefore would not be relevant to blind and partially sighted viewers.

- "I don't think, as a totally blind person, that I would get anything out of it even if it was described because it's alright saying something is running towards you but that's what they say on the telly anyway."
- "You say with the audio description that someone is running with a knife - but that would be all I would get out of the 3D, even if someone was physically running out of the screen ..... I wouldn't get the full effect."

Participants also raised concerns that incorporating 3D effects into description would take away time from describing other – more important – information.

- "I can think of disadvantages. Well you're talking about time and time is a big factor and there'll be less time to describe what they do already."

## **4. Group Presentation**

### **4.1 Where 3D is now and where is it going?**

The participants were given the background to the development of 3D in the cinema from the 1950's through to the release of James Cameron's 'Avatar' in 2010. This was followed by the launch of 3D televisions in spring 2010 and Sky and Virgin Media's 3D channels in autumn 2010.

### **4.2 Screening of 2D/3D Christmas Carol clip**

The group was shown a 2D film clip of Disney's 'A Christmas Carol' with the original 2D audio description. The group were then shown the same film clip in 3D with the film being freeze-framed and the 3D effect explained. The clip used was of the Ghost of Christmas Present flying Scrooge over London. The 3D effects were very much focussed on distance, depth and travelling at speed.

Participants with residual vision wore 3D glasses for the 3D presentation over their usual corrective eye wear i.e. prescription glasses or contact lenses. Blind participants had the opportunity to handle and try on the glasses.

## **5 Focus Group Discussion - Session Two**

### **5.1 Impressions of 3D descriptions**

Having watched the 3D clip with an explanation of the visual effects, participants were asked for their thoughts on the description of the visual effects and whether 3D was as they had expected.

Participants had a better understanding of how the 3D effect worked but struggled to see how it would affect the storyline of the film/programme.

- "Yes I think [it was what I expected], I got the impression of depth especially the vertigo. If you are on a height you imagine you get the real depth. But to be quite honest I would find that very tiresome being described to me all the time. I can't see any point in the context of the story that I was following. If I could see it, if I was partially sighted or had a degree of vision and would benefit from it - that's a different thing altogether isn't it?"
- "You either can or can't see the effect, and actually the audio description that was given initially was perfectly adequate I thought in terms of giving you the general idea."
- "I don't think it needed anything extra."

Participants also struggled with why they would want to know what the 3D visual effects were.

- "I don't need to know that other people, who can see, are seeing the snowflakes out of the screen, why do I need to know that?"
- "Everything coming out of the screen at you - no - you want to know what is happening on the screen."

## **5.2 Preferred information about visual effects**

Participants were asked if there was any information about the visual effects that they would like to know.

It was felt that the audio description for the 2D film version already incorporated the necessary information.

- "I think it was there anyway..... because it did describe what was going on. I don't see what else you could say."

In films where there is already a lot happening, often in a fantasy environment - concern was expressed that the 3D description would only add to what was already a confusing scene.

- "I think in those sorts of films where there's a hell of a lot going on on the screen, and for me who relies on watching the screen, I need that described to me in the way it was described to me so that I can make sense of it all. Because

there is so much going on and it is an alien concept .....it's not like someone walking down the street - it's not normal for rooms to move. It's a bit like the Harry Potter thing when the staircases are moving - that's not normal, so therefore I need it described so I can understand it and I think it did it adequately in the [2D] description."

### **5.3 Required information about the visual effects**

Participants were asked if they needed any information about the visual effects.

The general consensus was that the 2D description already included enough information about what was happening.

- "I think it was relevant saying that Scrooge was looking down - that set the scene ... but that was part of the [2D] audio description."
- "And going over the rooftops as well you've got the depth already."

It was repeated that the participants were not interested in the visual effects which were intended to create a reaction from the audience.

- "I think if you start describing the technical side of the 3D effect - take a movie like King Kong, we're all familiar with the context of what King Kong was, Empire State Building, great big gorilla - I actually don't particularly want to know that it was coming out of the screen and all the rest of it. I actually want to know how he's holding the woman in his hand, the building collapsing, that's actually what the audio description tells me. I don't see what is to be gained by me knowing that this feels like King Kong has got his hand coming out .... I don't think that that's relevant to me."
- "If I was watching with sighted kids ... I don't need this person telling me the technical wizardry, my kids would say "Oh dad, it just came out at me" - that would do for me."

## **5.4 AD information they would be prepared to lose to accommodate 3D effects?**

Participants were asked if there was any information they would be prepared to lose of the 2D AD in order to fit in description of the 3D effects.

The general consensus of opinion was that the current audio description guidelines adequately covered both the 2D and 3D versions.

- "I would want to lose nothing - just stay the way it is."
- "If the describer is clever enough it's built in anyway."
- "What would they tell us about the 3D - he's hanging down a hole and the hole is bottomless?"
- "The audio description was adequate for what was going on. For me as a totally blind person, I personally wouldn't bother with 3D myself."
- "As someone that can see a bit I wouldn't bother with it either - just describing 'he's looking over the rooftops' with the audio description that was given, it was adequate."

There were many in-depth discussions about why people who were unable to see would be interested in what is, in effect, a visual experience.

- "I understood [the] description but I just don't think that audio description in 3D would work because it's an optical illusion isn't it? Do you remember when those two magicians made a 747 disappear - it was all optical illusions. People looking at it thought, blimey it's gone, but it hadn't. And it's like that - trying to explain an optical illusion to a blind person."
- "3D to blind people is what stereo sound is to deaf people."
- "3D is visual and if you've not got vision or not a lot of vision then it's not necessary."

- "It's exciting to watch but I don't understand yet the relevance of it as a blind person. It's a bit like describing a tasty meal isn't it - you've got to eat it! I had a fantastic burger last night the cheese was melting into the burger and the mayonnaise was fantastic and the bread .... this is a bit boring because you're not tasting it."
- "3D is visual and if you've not got vision or not a lot of vision then it's not necessary."

For participants with congenital blindness - there was also the difficulty of grasping a purely visual effect based on perspective; if you have never seen perspective and depth of vision is not part of your world.

- "The nearest I can get to it ..... I had headphones on the other day listening to a rock concert and I heard someone shout from right up in the gods in the audience. I could hear the depth from above me - I knew it was high above me - it's the nearest I can get to 3D."
- "You can hear the background noises and you can hear how big the room is ... so I think this is the nearest we can get to understanding 3D."
- "I still don't know what they would tell you that's different. Apart from the fact that it looks fantastic or the hole looks bottomless and it looks a long way down, which is fantastic to see but I'm not sure that information helps you to understand."

Also amongst those with acquired sight loss - there was no support for the 3D effects being audio described.

- "When I had sight and I went to America I was going on one of the little planes that flies through the Grand Canyon and it took my breath away. It was immense .... if I flew through it again now it wouldn't be the same. It's on the eyes - it's the depth - everything was so immense, it was spectacular but if I flew through it now with somebody audio describing - it would mean nothing."
- "What audio description does for me is half way between me reading a book - my imagination is magical because I reckon

my imagination is better than anything they could produce .... my imagination takes over - all I want is to be put in that place."

- "The only way I would opt into 3D is if I had a family but I would expect the audio description to be the same level as 2D TV really. .... I mean if there's time and there's no pay off then chuck some in but if we're losing things just for the sake of it then no."

## **6. Group Presentation Two**

### **6.1 How 3D works**

Participants were told about how 3D was filmed and broadcast. They were given the opportunity to examine the different kinds of 3D glasses used for viewing 3D television and to learn how the glasses work with the TV screen.

### **6.2 Screening of 2D/3D Alice in Wonderland clip**

The participants were shown a 3 minute 2D film clip of Disney's 'Alice in Wonderland' with the original 2D audio description. The group were then shown the same film clip in 3D with the film being freeze-framed and the 3D effect being explained. The clip showed Alice arriving in Wonderland and being pursued by the Bandersnatch. The clip gave viewers the experience of being chased and the Bandersnatch kicking up gravel which came out of the screen towards the audience.

Participants with residual vision wore 3D glasses for the 3D presentation over their usual corrective eye wear i.e. prescription glasses or contact lenses. Blind participants had the opportunity to handle and try on the glasses.

## **7 Focus Group Discussion - Session Three**

### **7.1 Any additional thoughts or change of opinion.**

Participants were asked after seeing another example from a 3D film, had they had any other thoughts or changed their opinion.

The overwhelming consensus was that describing the 3D effects added nothing to their experience.

- "If all they are going to say is that the stones look as if they are coming towards you - I don't see how they can improve on it."
- "It doesn't add anything to it. If you can't see them, there's no point telling you."
- "If Alice is running towards you and comes out of the screen ... it wouldn't make any difference to us because we've got our own theory of where she's running, which way she's running, we've already conjured it up in our imagination."

Participants were also concerned that describing the 3D effect would take time from other things that could be described instead.

- "I'd rather hear more information about the way she's [Alice] running rather than the effects. You want more about her don't you?"
- "I don't think there was time to do anything, I think that is the big issue isn't it - time versus information."

## **7.2 Fitting 3D effects into priorities for AD**

Participants were asked to go back to the earlier exercise of prioritising different elements of information to include in AD, and to add in the description of the 3D effect.

Of the eleven priorities for AD given to the groups in the first session, 'film credits' came next to bottom. The consensus of the focus groups was that 3D effects came very low down in the list of priorities for audio describing a film or TV programme - either just above or just below film credits.

- "I'd put [3D effects] above film credits because I think they can be incorporated into the description if the description's done well. .... to me it's not very important at all but it is marginally more important in very specific circumstances than the film credits."
- "I'd put [3D effects] just above credits."
- "I'd put [3D effects] below credits actually as I still come back to the point that I can't see the point of describing the special effects. It's more important to know the name of the producer I

think than it is to know that stones are coming out of the screen."

- "Personally I would put [3D effects] at the bottom because it doesn't mean a thing to me as an individual."
- "[3D effects are] not important at all - that's my view as a totally blind person."
- "It's just a special effect - so [3D effects are] below credits for me."

### **7.3 Preferences for 2D versus 3D AD**

Participants were asked which AD they would prefer if there was only one version available.

Either:

- a 2D audio description that went with both 2D and 3D films, or
- a 3D audio description including visual effects that went with both the 3D and the everyday 2D film.

The focus groups unanimously agreed that the AD for the 2D version of the film/TV programme would be preferable for both the 2D and 3D versions.

- "Thinking of myself and other visually impaired people I wouldn't have thought any different from the ordinary audio description because I think it covered it adequately - alright the animal is coming at you but that isn't going to make any difference to a person if they can't see."
- "I would say for most of the time the 2D would be adequate."
- "Sorry I'm going to stick my neck out - I think the 2D would be adequate."
- "Don't change a thing, just get more movies described!"

## **8 Group Presentation Three**

### **8.1 What does the future hold for 3D**

This presentation explained developments in auto-stereoscopic 3D television which would eliminate the need for the viewer to wear glasses plus the research into holographic imagery for television.

The participants were thanked for taking part in the focus groups and copies of the full report would be sent to everyone upon publication.

## **9 Conclusion**

The small sample size and non-random selection of the participants prevents these findings from being used to generalise the results to the wider population from which the participants were taken. However, the results show a widely held and expressed opinion that blind and partially sighted users of AD do not feel 3D effects need to be incorporated into AD.

The two focus groups were unanimous - they did not feel that the AD guidelines should be changed to incorporate 3D visual effects, as many felt 3D was irrelevant to them. Participants were concerned that describing 3D effects would reduce the time available for audio describing the essential information regarding the film.

Participants placed the description of 3D effects towards the bottom their priority list for things to audio describe.

Perspective and depth of vision are not part of the experience of a person who was born blind - 3D is all about perspective and depth vision.

Participants felt the current 2D AD adequately covered both the 2D and 3D versions of the film.

Participants were not interested in visual effects which were intended to create a reaction from the audience.

Participants felt that description of the 3D effects added nothing to their experience of the film.

In summary, participants did not think that description of 3D effects should be included in the AD of a film or TV programme.

- "I think it's just one of those things - we've just got to face it - we're blind, we can't see - 3D is visual and that's it, it's really the end of the story."

## 10 Recommendations

- Based on the findings of this project it is recommended that description of 3D visual effects is not incorporated into audio description for 3D TV programmes and films
- No special guidelines are required
- The report findings should be circulated to audio description providers, UK film distributors and broadcasters
- The report should be sent to Ofcom and be taken into consideration when revising Ofcom's Best Practice Guidelines for Audio Description

## 11 References

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# **11 Appendices**

## **11.1 Appendix 1**

### **3D Audio Description Set Topic Guide**

#### **Introduction**

Good morning everyone. My name is Joan Greening and I'll be leading this morning's 3D session which will be a mixture of me explaining to you about how 3D works, how it has developed and where it's heading. We'll also be playing clips from 2D films with the 2D audio description and we will then watch the same clips in 3D when I will freeze frame the film and explain what the 3D effects are. You'll then get chance to discuss in smaller focus groups how you think audio description could be affected by 3D.

There are no right or wrong answers today - we are simply seeking your personal views - what you think about audio description for 3D and the reasons behind your thoughts. Just a reminder that the discussions are being recorded. Your names will not be used in any reports but we may use some of your comments. You will be working in small discussions groups so you should have chance to express your views openly, don't worry if you disagree with other people in your group. We need to know everyone's point of view.

And why do we want to know what you think? For the future. No-one really knows if 3DTV will take off in a big way. At some time in the future will 3D be all there is available? If so, we want to know what you want to happen with audio description. We don't want to wait until it is too late to do anything about it. Forewarned is forearmed.

But first off we're going to split you into two groups - and these are the discussion focus groups you will be working with for the rest of the morning.

You'll do a warm up exercise to start with - just to get you in the mood for chatting and also for you to experience the difficulties an audio describer has every time they write a description. So much to say and so little time.

There will then be an opportunity to discuss your initial thoughts on 3D and audio description.

Split into focus groups.

## **Focus Group Discussion:**

### **Warm up exercise - audio description priorities**

- Hello everyone. My name is [facilitator] I will be facilitating our discussion today.
- Before we get started, I think it would be good to introduce ourselves. As we're talking about TV today, let's get to know each other a little bit by saying our first name, where we come from and a favourite TV programme. If I start [facilitator introduces]. Then if we go clockwise round the table...
- Just to remind everybody, our discussion is being recorded
- What we discuss here today will be confidential. Your names will not appear in any reports and you won't be identified in any way.
- We're really interested to hear what you think, please feel absolutely free to answer honestly, and to voice opinions that are different to other members of the group. We're interested in what everyone has to say.
- If you want to leave discussion, that's fine

### **How it will work**

- To make sure everyone has a chance to speak, I will ask a question and then go around the group asking for each person's thoughts. But it is meant to be a discussion, so if you want to respond to what someone else has said please feel free to chip in.
- When doing this, it would really help if you could say your name first, so everyone knows someone else is waiting to speak and we'll come to you next. Please try not to talk over each other so we can all hear what is being said.

To start with, as a warm up exercise, I'd like us to think about which elements of information are important in audio description. I've got eleven different elements here and I'd like you to put them in order of importance. There are no right or wrong answers, we want to know your opinion. Hopefully we can reach a group consensus, but it's fine if you have different ideas.

If I read out the different elements first - then perhaps we can start to put them in order. As I read them out, perhaps you could each shout out how important you think each one is (very important, important, not very important, not important)

[Facilitator: Make sure you keep a record of the order the cards are placed in as we will come back to this exercise at the end of the morning.]

- Who is there? [*John perches on the desk, Alice turns to Jack*]
- What are they wearing? [*sexy red blouse, smart black suit*]
- What do they look like? [*large nose, blonde hair, rotten teeth*]
- How old are they? [*young, middle-aged, teenager, thirty-something*]
- Where are they? [*At home, In the café, Outside the bank*]
- What are they doing? [*he lunges at her with the knife, she plummets, they kiss*]
- What else is happening? [*blood drips from the table-top, a rose petal slowly drifts to the floor*]
- How are they doing it? [*she recoils, he leans forward, she grimaces, he frowns*]
- Film credits [*director/actors' names*]
- On screen information [*Berlin 1945, 4 April 2002 - FBI Headquarters*]
- Film genre [*animation, black and white film*]

[Final agreement reached. Put cards to one side in correct order with most important on top of the pile.]

## **Focus Group Discussion: Initial impressions/ideas**

OK - now to 3D. Thinking about when you were first contacted about taking part today, what were your initial thoughts about 3D and audio description?

Once discussion gets under way please ask these additional questions:

- How important is it for you to know what the film looks like, compared to what is happening in the film?

- Would you want audio description to include information about the visual 3D effects? Why/why not?
- What would be the advantages/disadvantages of 3D audio description?

Back to main group.

## **Main Group presentation: Where 3D is now and where is it going?**

General information session.

So what is 3D like today - lets take a look at the first clip. It's Disney's live action animation of Christmas Carol starring Jim Carey as Scrooge. Scrooge has just met the Ghost of Christmas Present. First we'll watch it in 2D with audio description.

- Screen Christmas Carol film clip in 2D with 2D pre-recorded audio description of 'Ghost of Christmas Past sparks scene/flying over city'.

OK, we have three extra pairs of 3D glasses - so if you do have some useful vision and would like to try them out - shout now!

- Screen same film clip in 3D with a freeze-frame explanation [not an audio description] of the 3D effect.

Back into focus groups.

## **Focus Group Discussion: Christmas Carol**

What did you think of Joan's explanation of the 3D effects?  
[Prompt: was it interesting?]

If there had been space to describe the 3D effect in the audio description:

- What information about the visual effects would you like to know?
- What information about the visual effects do you think you need?

- Bearing in mind that space is a problem in AD, what other information would you be prepared to lose to fit in a description of the 3D effect?

Back to main group

## **Main Group Presentation:**

### **How 3D works**

General information session

So now you know how it works - let's check out another film clip. Same formula as before - first in 2D with audio description, then in 3D with me explaining the 3D effects. This is Disney's live action animation - Alice in Wonderland which starred Johnny Depp as the Mad Hatter and in this clip Alice has just fallen down the rabbit hole and arrived in Wonderland.

Screen 2D clip of Alice in Wonderland with AD  
Screen 3D clip with freeze frames and description.

## **Focus Group Discussion:**

### **Alice in Wonderland**

Having had another example of 3D, do you have anything else to say?

### **Where does 3D fit in AD priorities?**

Go back to original priority list cards for audio description and remind the group of the order they agreed on.

Hand out 3D card option.

- Where does this new 3D AD option fit in our priority and why?
- If you could only have one version of audio description for both the 2D and 3D version of the film or programme which would you prefer. 2D description for 2D & 3D or 3D description for 2D & 3D?

Back to main group

## **Main Group Presentation: What does the future hold for 3D?**

General information session

I'd like to thank you all for taking part this morning and I'll let you all have a copy of the report when it is published.

ISBN 978-1-4445-0100-1

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