University of Brighton

http://cetld.brighton.ac.uk

**Perspectives on podcasts**
**Final Report**
**September 2009**

**Rebecca Reynolds**

**Outcomes of the project**

'Perspectives on podcasts' aimed to produce:

**(i)** 4-7 podcasts posted on the V&A and CETLD websites aimed at design students, functioning as introductions to the V&A's permanent galleries.

**(ii)** Research findings into:

-The effect of the materials on students' visiting patterns and experience of the galleries
-Students' preferences for when they use interpretation: before, during or after a visit or not at all
-Responses to content
-Preferences regarding podcasts as a form of technology; e.g. preferences for listening to them on a PC or MP3 player.
-Quality of podcasts produced 'in-house' as opposed to being produced by an external company such as Antenna Audio.

**Purpose and scope of this report**

The purpose of this report is to summarise the progress and outcomes of the 'Perspectives on Podcasts' project and draw out lessons which could be useful for other similar work. It covers:

1. Background to the project

2. What happened during the project

3. Research procedure and findings

4. Differences in project outcomes from those envisaged in project proposal

5. Budget summary

6. Lessons learnt

7. Dissemination

8. Developing the project

**1. Background to the project**

The initial idea for the project came from a magazine article in which a member of staff at a museum wondered if podcasts which visitors could listen to on the way to the museum would be effective.

Museum interpretation which is used before the visit, rather than during the visit, is an innovative idea and in my view a good one. It is a truism in pedagogical theory that preparing for learning helps one to learn effectively. Yet it is unclear how often design students do this before museum visits which they undertake alone. Baseline CETLD research showed that students usually visited the V&A for temporary

exhibitions. They might explore the permanent galleries while they were here, but the permanent galleries were 'unlikely to trigger a dedicated visit'(Fisher 2007:30). This is implies that students do not prepare to see these. Experiencing them 'cold' might lessen their value to learners.

In addition, experience with students through CETLD research and teaching revealed that many students were unaware of the permanent galleries and their contents. The podcasts aimed to increase students' knowledge of these.

Students are also often under time pressure and if they could be used on the way to the museum -say, on the train- on an MP3 player this might add to their appeal.

The development of the podcasts also responded to other research findings from baseline research about design students' use of museums:

- ' The V&A will be criticised for trying to have the last word. It would do better to use its authority to create an arena for different perspectives and debate.' (Fisher 2007:21). Research for the' iGuides from StreetAccess' project (see below) also showed that multiple perspectives on the objects were popular with students, and recognizing multiple perspectives is an essential skill in design learning (QAA). Each podcast contains perspectives from three different people, among them curators, students, design tutors and practitioners and others.
- Experience and research with students showed that they often had strong preferences for how they wanted to look at objects in museums. Baseline research showed students could be suspicious of mobile learning technologies as depriving them of their independence in viewing objects as they wanted to the galleries (Fisher 2007: 39). The podcasts aimed to avoid competition with students' preferred ways of seeing in the galleries by being able to be used before, during or after a visit, both inside and outside the gallery space. If they were used outside the gallery space, this also meant they were not in direct competition with the objects.
- They were also non-directive - although they mentioned specific objects they were more like overviews or responses to whole galleries and did not recommend an order for moving round the galleries. This was also a response to the baseline research comment that the V&A should 'help without appearing to help' (Fisher 2007:25).
-

The project also aimed to put into practice lessons from the 'iGuides from StreetAccess' project. Materials developed for the iGuides project had ultimately proved unusable due to the unreliability of wireless streaming and unreliability and complicated nature of the PDAs. 'Perspectives on Podcasts', in contrast, used a tried and tested form of technology (downloadable audio files) and could be used with the students' own devices, which they would already be familiar with. The project thus had the aim of developing good quality resources which could be used as part of the V&A's educational provision, as well as providing research findings into the topics listed above.

The project also arose from my interest in the increasing popularity in museum interpretation and in education more widely of what is sometimes termed user-

generated content.  In a museum context, this means interpretation developed by visitors rather than museum professionals such as curators.  This is often viewed positively as a chance for museums to offer more than one viewpoint on their collections, adding 'depth and vitality' (Durbin 2004: 1) to the displays and being a chance to appeal to different audiences who may not view curatorial expertise as the type of interpretation most relevant to them.  However, to my knowledge the value of user-generated content to other visitors (i.e. those who have not generated it) has not been researched in depth, and so far I have not encountered research where its usefulness in pedagogical terms had been theorised or tested. This project offered the opportunity to do that by including students' and others' views on the podcasts, thus offering interpretation from outside the museum side-by-side with curatorial expertise. Students' responses to the different viewpoints were tested as part of the research.

The project also arose from my interest in developing museum audio interpretation which takes a different approach to object-to-object guidance with explanation focused on each object., the most common approach with museum audio guides.  In this it had aims in common with the ' Re-Inscriptions' CETLD project run by Louise Purbrick.

## 2.  What happened during the project

| Date | Action/event |
|---|---|
| May 2008 | Podcast training, run by the E-Learning Group.  Useful for understanding how to make podcasts, getting advice such as the optimum length of podcasts and where to source music from, and making contacts. |
| November 2008 | Develop pilot podcast and post on CETLD website.  This used material from a trail developed for the iGuides project, along with additional material (an interview with a design student). |
| November 2008 | Informally evaluate pilot podcast.  This was done with 7 people - 3 design students, 2 V&A staff and 2 CETLD colleagues (appendix 1). From this and other advice given at this stage it became clear that the podcasts should  ideally be no longer than 10 minutes and certainly no longer than 12 minutes; interviews were more engaging than monologues (one contribution was subsequently rerecorded as an interview rather than a monologue); the purpose of the podcasts needed to be clear - if they were object to object guides this should be explicitly stated, if they were overviews of gallery spaces that should also be explicitly stated. The technical quality of the podcast was adequate.  The project also drew on iGuides formative evaluation in developing content. |
| December -April 2009 | Develop podcasts.  This involved:<br>-choosing galleries to base the podcasts on<br>-interviewing people to speak about the galleries<br>-arranging transcription of interviews<br>-writing scripts and recording links (spoken by me)<br>-sending scripts for approval by learning services manager Morna Hinton and by contributors<br>-choosing music for podcasts (royaltyfreemusic.com)<br>-sending audio files to be edited (audiofortheweb.com) |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Four galleries were chosen: the British Galleries, since many students were unaware of these and they were likely to be useful, for example in including sections on the Great Exhibition and the Arts and Crafts movement; the Jewellery Gallery, since this was a new gallery; the Cast Courts, since iGuides recordings could be reused; and the Silver Galleries, since these are large galleries with many resources, including interactive interpretation, but many students were unaware of these.<br><br>Finding people to interview depended upon the availability of curators, contacts at Brighton , the V&A and elsewhere, and a certain amount of luck. Most speakers were interested and willing to give time to be interviewed, as long as they had advance notice of some weeks. It helped to do some research into their specialism or area of interest before the interview to show them that I had some knowledge of their work and to choose aspects to ask about. The process was probably similar to making a radio programme.<br><br>Some things didn't work; for example, I interviewed two visitors at to the Silver Galleries who had come up for the day from southwest England. Although it was interesting to talk to them, I did not feel the interview should be included on a podcast, since students needed something more unusual or specialist. Similarly, I thought it would be interesting to interview an information assistant since they spend more time than anyone else with the objects on display and are likely to be familiar with how visitors react to the objects. However, one assistant I spoke to said something like 'people react differently depending on what they interested in' which is true but not suitable for a podcast. Instead, one assistant mentioned James Cross, an information assistant who lives and works in the Brompton Oratory next door, who was able to talk about the objects in the silver galleries compared with similar objects in daily use in the Oratory. This was an unusual and fascinating insight on the collections. |
| May 2009 | Place completed podcasts on CETLD site (with help of CETLD ICT development officer Roland Mathews). |
| June-August 2009 | Carry out research into students' preferences for using the podcasts and their effect on students' experience of the museum. |
| August 2009 | Deliver podcasts and associated media (text and images) to V&A web team for placing on V&A website. |

The project timetable ended one month later than planned, due to a high level of work on the CETLD book which was needed in April and May 2009. In addition, it is not certain when the podcasts will appear on the V&A website; this is because it is a long time since the V&A has had podcasts on its site, and the technical team need to research the best way of doing this.

## 3. Research procedure and findings

**Research procedure**

The questions the research intended to answer were these three:

1. What effect do the podcasts have on students' experience of the museum?

2. How do students prefer to use them (for example before, during or after the visit).

3. Would students use them? Why/why not ?

These questions would contribute to knowledge in all the five areas mentioned in the research outcomes except the quality of podcasts produced in-house, which I can comment on. See appendix 2 for the full research protocol.

In addition, after piloting the questionnaire in June 2009 with one student, I added a question asking students which speaker they preferred, with the aim of shedding light on their preferences for curatorial expertise or other types of interpretation.

The research questionnaire (appendix 3) was produced in consultation with the head of learning services Morna Hinton and others.

Twenty students were interviewed. Fifteen came from the University of Brighton, three from Sussex University, and one each from University of the Arts London and the University of Chichester. The level of study of the students is given below. The research took place in the summer, and the level given is that which the student is going on to next (for this reason there are no level 1 students).

|  | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | graduated | Not given |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of students | 0 | 11 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 |

**Research findings**

1. What effect do the podcasts have on students' experience of the museum?

I have grouped these according to the number of times they were mentioned by students, in descending order.

| Effect on experience of the museum |  |
|---|---|
| *Positive* |  |
| It provided knowledge and information | 10 |
| It made me look at things in a different way | 4 |
| It prepared me for visiting | 4 |
| It made me notice aspects of the gallery or objects which I wouldn't have noticed otherwise | 3 |
| It gave me a design perspective | 1 |
| It crystallised my thoughts about the gallery | 1 |
| It was a talking point | 1 |
| It made me use the computer terminal in the gallery | 1 |
| It was soothing | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| It gave me freedom to walk around while listening | 1 |
| It kept me interested | 1 |
| | |
| *Negative* | |
| It distracted me from the gallery | 3 |
| It was frustrating to wait for information | 1 |
| It didn't add anything to my visit | 1 |

The most common reason why podcasts were valued was because they provide extra information. Apart from that there were a wide range of positive responses which showed that podcasts could be useful to students for differing reasons and from different levels of study. This is an encouraging result, given that students who visit come from a variety of backgrounds and courses and are likely to have different expectations of their visit. Some of the most interesting results arose from students' individual learning approaches and responses to the materials. For example, one student found she was distracted from the objects in the British Galleries by the podcast, but this made her look at the objects in a new way, without being 'led' by museum interpretation. Another student appreciated 'quirky little stories' on the Cast Courts podcast, commenting that stories, in his view, inspired people to create. When students were asked what the most memorable part of their visit was, many mentioned particular objects not mentioned on the podcast, which confirmed that the podcasts left some freedom for students to explore the galleries in their own way.

It also shows that some students experienced the podcasts as a distraction from or impediment to the way they wanted to experience the collections.

2. How would students prefer to use them (for example before, during or after the visit).

| Preferred way of using | Number of students |
|---|---|
| Before | 8 |
| During | 5 |
| Before or during | 2 |
| After | 2 |
| Before and during | 1 |
| Before or after | 1 |
| Before, during and after | 1 |

This showed that the podcasts could be used flexibly to some extent, but worked best before the visit.

3. Would students use them? Why/why not ?

| Yes/no | Number of students |
|---|---|
| Yes | 10 |
| Yes with reservations | 10 |

Reservations were usually expressed in terms of 'yes I would use one if/but...', with the sentences completed as follows.  Each was said by one student unless otherwise indicated.

Yes I would use one if...

… I could gain something I wouldn't otherwise.
... I was looking at something in particular and it prepared me.
... there was detailed information on certain pieces.
... it was more zesty.
... it had more choice (2 students).
... it was broken down into sections.
... there was more interactivity.
... it was interesting and special.
... the technology was easy to use.

Yes I would use one but...

... it would be frustrating.
... I'm terrible with technology.

For each student who unequivocally said they would use the podcasts, another expressed reservations about the type of content.  These can be taken as recommendations for future podcasts.  The detailed information on certain pieces is of course better for podcasts which are more like object to object guides.  Podcasts are not interactive, but can be broken into sections to some extent by putting parts on different tracks, and thus offering some choice.

Only two students expressed reservations about the technology itself, implying that podcasts per se are not likely to be rejected by students.  Two students recommended that devices be made available at the museum, though again this is more relevant to guides designed to be used inside galleries.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the podcasts can be said to be an appropriate support for design students visiting the museum, in that most students said their visit had been enhanced.  The podcasts left students leeway to make their own discoveries inside the galleries and gave students the option of using them away from the galleries so that they did not interfere with the way in which students wanted to interact with objects.  The findings confirm the value of interpretation which is not explicitly for use in the galleries.

However, the podcasts were felt to be a distraction by a minority of students.  In addition, half the students expressed reservations when asked if they would use one at the museum, which confirms baseline research findings that students may be suspicious of mobile learning technologies and that they will not be welcomed by all students.

I suggest that the podcasts are more suitable for undergraduates than postgraduates, since they function as introductions to the galleries and postgraduates are more likely

to be already aware of the V&A galleries, and to be using them for specific projects which the podcasts are less likely to be relevant to.

**Preferences for different speakers**

Students' preferences for different speakers was evenly spread, and reasons were diverse. For example, one student said she preferred the design tutor's comments on the Cast Courts because she wanted to learn from 'elders and great masters' not contemporary people such as the student she listened to, because she didn't want to imitate people. Another preferred the student on the same podcast because ' her approach was like mine'. I will analyse and comment more on this when discussing user-generated content in dissemination.

**Quality of podcasts produced in-house**

Museum podcasts vary from fairly unpolished recordings of live events, for example public discussions, to highly professional productions. These podcasts are somewhere in the middle - scripted and recorded in-house, but edited externally by a technical specialist.

This seems a successful approach, in terms of technical quality. No student commented that the podcasts weren't of a professional enough quality, and no students said they had had technical problems -for example, not being able to hear the audio.

However, they are quite labour intensive to produce. Early in the project the head of the online museum at the V&A, Gail Durbin, said that the V&A had given up producing podcasts because it was estimated that it took 40 hours to produce each one. I would say this is a correct estimate for these podcasts, if transcribing and editing is included.

However, podcasts can be kept on websites for long periods - years, sometimes. To a certain extent this compensates for the time put into producing them. However, in this case the podcasts should be made so that they remain relevant over time - for example, not based on temporary exhibitions. This was one of the aims of these podcasts, in being based on permanent galleries, and being gallery overviews rather than specifically mentioning too many objects, or which might be taken off display.

If the museum wants to include podcasts on its website, a less labour intensive solution is to post recordings of discussions and other events at the museum with minimal editing. This is done by many museums such as the Design Museum and Tate Modern.

**4. Differences in project outcomes from those envisaged in the project proposal**

Podcasts were tested with 20 students not 40; after speaking to other researchers I decided not to use a control group of 20 since this was not necessary for ascertaining the effect of the podcasts on students' experience of the museum. In addition, it would have presented considerable difficulties for student recruitment.

A podcast was not produced with Louise Purbrick since it did not prove practical in terms of respective project timetables and Louise's podcasts are meant for use by Brighton tutors rather than posting on the V&A website. However, we are planning joint dissemination of research results.

One podcast was made which reused iGuides material, rather than three envisaged in the project proposal; other material was either of an inadequate technical quality or did not fit in with the theme of the podcasts.

**Budget**

| | Allocated | Spent | Remaining | Reason for difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ICT resources** | | | | |
| Transcription | £400 | £300 (approximate; not invoiced yet) | £100 approx | Cheaper than estimate |
| Production costs | £1500 | £1380 | £120 | Cheaper than estimate |
| Podcast production training | £300 | £140 | £160 | Cheaper than estimate |
| **Dissemination** | | | | |
| Conference attendance | £1000 | £0 | £1000 | Dissemination has not so far required travel or conference fees. |
| **Publication, printing or equipment costs** | | | | |
| Publicity | £500 | £0 | £500 | Cannot be publicised widely until they are posted on the V&A website. |
| **Other** | | | | |
| Tutor support | £900 | £0 | £900 | Tutors did not need to be involved in designing podcasts. |
| Evaluation (student travel expenses and refreshments) | £1000 | £192.41 | £807.59 | Only 20 students were involved in the evaluation not 40 as originally planned; most travel tickets were off peak and some students did not travel from Brighton; some |

| | | | | students visited on a class visit and were not reimbursed.. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Payment to designers | £400 | £0 | £400 | Designers (Eva Jiricna, Anne Brodie, Dorothy Hogg) did not require payment |
| Payment to actor | £150 | £0 | £150 | No content required interpretation by an actor |
| Contingency | £500 | £124.31 (books, travel expenses for interviews, podcast music) | | Most contingency not needed |
| **Total** | **£6,650** | **£2136.72** | **£4513.28** | |

Please note these are not final figures since there will be publicity and dissemination costs, and all invoices for transcription have not yet been received.

**Lessons learnt**

This project put into practice lessons learned through the 'iGuides from StreetAccess' project, and has largely run smoothly.  The podcasts will form part of the V&A educational provision for design students and the V&A HE and Creative Industries programme manager (due to start at V&A September 2009) will be made aware of them. More podcasts of a similar type could be added to the series already developed.

There have been no technical problems and most of the technical aspects of the materials development has been outsourced, which contributed to the smooth running of the project.  Use of familiar technology has also contributed to this.

**Room for improvement**

The podcasts are overviews, and evaluation results show students prefer using them before a visit.  However, all the podcasts mention specific objects or parts of the galleries too.  This has not proved a problem with the Jewellery Gallery or Cast Courts podcasts, but some students who listened to the British Galleries podcast have been confused because they try to find the specific objects mentioned and the Galleries are so large that this takes some time and can cause frustration. It would have been better to concentrate purely on the gallery layout, themes and atmosphere for this podcast. (Only one student chose the Silver Galleries podcast so it is not possible to tell with that one).

**Benefits to partners**

| Partner | Benefits |
|---|---|

| V&A | Learning resources<br>Research findings into design students' use of the museum and attitudes to mobile learning technology<br>Information on the production of podcasts |
|---|---|
| **University of Brighton** | Learning resources which can be placed on various websites and recommended to students<br>Research findings into design students' use of the museum and attitudes to mobile learning technology |

## CETLD themes which this project addresses

1. Learning spaces: has investigated use of the museum as a physical learning space, and travel to and from the museum as 'intermediary learning spaces'
2. The student voice and a student-centred approach to learning: the resources include student views
3. The use and application of collections: has investigated students' use of interpretation when learning from collections

## Dissemination which has taken place

| Forum /event | Date | Who? |
|---|---|---|
| CETLD design scholarship seminar | 3/12/2008 | RR |
| Presentation at podcasting for pedagogic purposes group (PPG) | April 2009 | RR |
| Research in progress paper for Designs on E-Learning Conference (comparing podcasts and iGuides) | 1-3 September 2009 | RR |

## Planned dissemination

| Forum/event | Date | Who? |
|---|---|---|
| Peer-reviewed journal (overview of results) | tbc | RR, possibly with Louise Purbrick |
| University of Brighton Pedagogic Research Conference | 22 January 2010 | RR and Louise Purbrick |
| Peer reviewed journal (article on user-generated content) | tbc | RR |

## Developing the project

The podcasts will need to be promoted. Once they are on the V&A website, I hope to print bookmark-sized cards which can be distributed at art and design colleges such as University of the Arts, London. They could also be included in university induction

packs.  I will liaise with the V&A HE and Creative Industries programme manager about this.  They will also be promoted in the brochure which the CETLD team is at the V&A is planning.

Tutors at Brighton will be e-mailed with details of the podcasts.  It might also be feasible to hold a publicity event at Brighton for tutors.

**Bibliography**

Durbin,G.  (2004) ' Learning from Amazon and eBay: user-generated material for museum websites' Museums and the Web conference proceedings, http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/durbin/durbin.html


Fisher, S. (2007) and. 'How do HE tutors and students use museum collections in Design?' Qualitative Research for the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design. http://www.vam.ac.uk/files/file_upload/41303_file.pdf

## Appendix 1: Results of informal evaluation of pilot podcast

| How interesting was the podcast? (1 = not interesting, 5 = very interesting) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | No answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of people | | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| **Was the podcast...** | too short? | | just right? | | too long? | No answer |
| Number of people | 0 | | 4 | | 2 | 1 |

## Appendix 2: Perspectives on podcasts: research questions and procedure

Relevant CETLD research objectives (from the CETLD research strategy, Speight, 2007):

5.1 To develop resources that can be used both online and in galleries on mobile learning technology

5.3 To research how design-led learning in the museum can be enhanced by the use of innovative new technologies in the museum

5.4 To evaluate the effectiveness of innovative technologies in the museum

**Research questions**

**1. What effect do the podcasts have on students' experience of the museum?**

**2. How do students prefer to use them (for example before, during or after the visit).**

**3. Would students use them? Why/why not ?**

**Procedure**

**The 4 podcasts developed as part of the project will be put onto 10 iPods (the maximum that is available from Brighton). These will be given out to design students, along with an instruction sheet and outline of the podcasts (attached). The most efficient way to do this will be to visit classes.**

**When they are recruited, students will fill in a preliminary questionnaire with details of how/whether they use MP3 players and how often they visit museums and the V&A.**

**Times will be arranged for students to visit the V&A with the iPod. After their visit they will be interviewed by the Higher Education Officer using the attached questionnaire. The aim is to interview 20 students.**

**The interview will use the attached questionnaire as a starting point, including further questions if appropriate. If students have taken notes or made sketches during a visit, these will also be used as a stimulus to discussion. This is a phenomenological approach to research described by Laurillard: 'the student's account is not taken as an objective description of a psychological process, but as being itself a phenomenon which is to be analysed.' (Laurillard, 2002).**

**This is a qualitative research technique, aiming to get at the detail of how students describe their experience in the galleries.**

**Data will be analysed for themes which emerge.**

**Research findings will be useful in:**

- **Understanding how resources accessed on mobile learning technology affect design students' experience of the museum**
- **identifying how students prefer to use such resources**

These findings decision will feed into future resource development.

Laurillard, D. (2002) 'Rethinking university teaching: a framework for effective use of learning technologies' Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer.

## **Appendix 3: Podcast questionnaire**

I'd like to learn a bit about your experience of visiting the museum today.

1. Which gallery did you visit?

2. Why did you choose that one?

3. Tell me about your visit.

4. What was most memorable about it?

5. How did you decide to use the podcast?

6. Did that work for you?

7. Did the podcast add anything to your visit?

8. Would you like to say a bit more about that?

9. Which person did you find most interesting?

10. Would you use a podcast like this?

11. Would you like to add anything else?