



Audio Description Association

Welcome to the First ADA Newsletter of 2025!

Happy (belated) New Year! As we step into 2025, we hope you're keeping warm during these chilly winter months. It's the perfect time to cosy up with our latest What's On guide, packed with exciting events to kickstart the year. This edition also features an exclusive interview with our Honorary Secretary, Paul Downs, plus details on our upcoming Skill Sets sessions and the ever-popular AD Soup online gatherings—great opportunities to connect, learn, and share insights with fellow AD professionals. Stay warm, stay inspired, and here's to a fantastic year ahead!

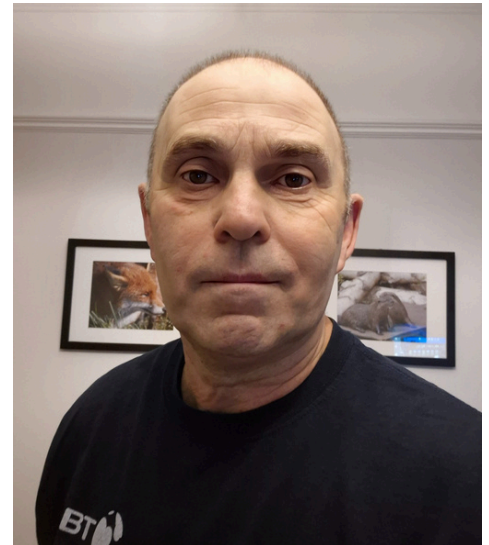
Warm regards,
The ADA Comms Team :)

ADA Spotlight -

🥁 Drumroll, please! 🥁 ADA's recently appointed Honorary Secretary, Paul Downs joins Tim Calvert on [A View On Access Podcast](#) and shares how he discovered AD and his vision for the role. Take it away Tim....

Tim: If you'd like to introduce yourself, tell me a bit about yourself and where you've come from.

Paul: My name is Paul Downs, and I've just taken on the role of Honorary Secretary for ADA. I'm retired, but most of my working life was primarily in office and middle management. When my children were born, I was in my 40s, and I gave up office work and turned myself into a gardener to look after the kids as well. Then, I returned to office management until I retired at 60. I am a serial volunteer; with disability sports, particularly wheelchair rugby, which has taken me all over Europe. As I've moved into my 60s, I'm doing less physical stuff because I can't keep up with the wheelchairs anymore. 😊 I also volunteer with the London Open House Festival, and through that, I did a guided walk on Brutalist architecture. Being keen on accessibility, I wanted to do something for the visually impaired. I came across ADA while seeking AD training so I could do some tours for the festival. I had some lovely conversations with the membership secretary, Trish, who was very helpful. I knew that the courses were being reviewed at the time, but I joined because it's something I believe in. And I'm the new secretary because I made a daft offer, and I think I got a reply from the chairman about three seconds later, almost biting my hand off.



Tim: What inspired you most about AD? What's your experience of AD, and what made you want to learn more?

Paul: With the Open House festival, I'm driving their attempts to make it more accessible, but the focus is currently on hearing impairment. So I decided I wanted to do something different, and I chose visual impairment because it's something I have experience of within the family. Chatting with a VI relative made me think. He loves sport and can't, as he used to do, go and watch rugby matches at Twickenham. Some of the sports grounds are getting quite good at doing descriptions, and listening to the radio commentary gives you a vague idea, but there would be things you couldn't just go and do. Also, about 75 yards from my lounge is a building called Swale House, which is owned by an organisation called Action for the Blind. It's a residential home, and I know some of these guys from the local pub. So, I have a bunch of friends with visual impairment locally, as well as family. That also got me thinking about describing photographs I put on social media with alt text, so it was a combination of those things that I searched for a course and found ADA online.

Tim: Have you heard much AD, did you like to put it on the telly occasionally?

Paul: It was the first thing I did when I got involved with ADA, I started doing it, with EastEnders which I don't usually watch, and I was impressed because it had never crossed my mind.



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk

ADA Events:**ADA Skill Set sessions - with Tim Calvert.**

Jan: [Audio description - The Cinematography approach](#) with Andrew Piper

Monday 27th of Jan 15.00 - 16.30

Learn how to turn the visual language of screen drama into vivid descriptions for blind and VI audiences. Close-ups pull you into a character's soul, while wide shots set the scene and mood. Describers need to find a way to achieve the same effect with their words rather than simply reporting what the screen looks like at any given moment.

Feb: [Describing Ballet and Opera](#) with Jonathan Nash

Dates: TBC

Mar: [AD software 101 - a beginner's guide to using AD software and describing for Film and TV](#) with Cara Edney from Hear Say and Cristian Pacurar from Yella Umbrella.

Monday 31st of March, from 14:00 to 15:30

An interactive, step-by-step class allowing describers to trial AD software and learn the basic principles of describing for screen.

ADA's AD Soup sessions.

Feb: [Applying Theatrical audio description methods to other content](#) - with Megan Harms

Wed Feb 5th 19:00 and 20:00

Megan Harms, an American audio describer in Illinois will share her unique insight of using her theatrical audio description training and adapting it to a wide range of things ranging from sport, exhibitions, parades, a day out at the zoo, burlesque and arts and crafts



Audio Description Association

ADA Spotlight Continued...

I knew AD existed because sometimes you turn it on accidentally with your remote when you hit the wrong button. Still, I hadn't realised how little time they have in between the dialogue to make a description, so you've got to be extraordinarily selective, and I was impressed with that.

Tim: How are you finding your role as ADA secretary?

Paul: I'm settling in. My first meeting was the day-long meeting in October last year, where I didn't know anybody, and I wasn't the secretary then, so thankfully, I didn't have to take the minutes for a six-hour meeting. The executive meeting is coming up shortly, so I've started more official communication with people en masse, but I'm settling in. I don't know who does what, where, when and how and frequently ask the wrong person the right thing or the right person the wrong thing. I know I will enjoy it because they're a nice bunch of people, which is the most important thing; I'm not doing it for money, so I've got to enjoy what I'm doing.

Tim: What are your hopes and aspirations in the role going forward?

Paul: There's potential for this to become a much bigger organisation. Once all the training courses are re-established, you start reaching out to new subscribers, getting them involved, and getting them to learn how to describe. The knock-on effect of that is providing a better service for the visually impaired around the country because a lot of things are London-centric, and the rest of the country gets forgotten. So you need to ensure that we can teach them to work in their own communities. I know the association's been around for a while, but I feel like I've almost come in on the ground floor. There will be quite an expansion over the next couple of years as these projects come to fruition,

and I like the concept of helping it grow. I want to make a difference. If I can't make a difference with it, I might as well not be here.

Tim: Which aspect would you say you're looking forward to the most?

Paul: From a personal perspective, it's the courses because that was the first thing I contacted ADA about, and it's quite important you know it's the Audio Description Association. It should be providing accredited courses because that's what its name is. From an association perspective, the courses will also increase the membership, and it's an exponential thing. I know that's how we're trying to go at the moment to increase the membership, but you've got to give them what they want, and my view on that would be things like the courses.

Tim: You aspired to become an audio describer, so, what about AD excites you to want to be a describer?

Paul: From a personal perspective, I like small group interaction, so I'm considering doing them in museums. I like leading walking tours for the festival and things like that. So, to have a small group where I'm initially describing something will create questions, answers, and interaction. And that is something I enjoy because, to be perfectly frank, I get a good feeling if it goes well, and hopefully, it makes the audience feel good as well. And that's my driver for a lot of things. I want to make a difference. I mean, it's a very corny line. And did I get something out of it? You know, you have to be honest about this. I get to feel good as well.

To learn more about Paul you can listen to the full interview on

 [A View On Access Podcast](#) 



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk

ADA News:

New VI memberships scheme - coming soon!

A little teaser to let you all know that we're working on the finishing touches of an exciting new scheme to encourage more blind and partially blind people to join ADA.

That's all we can say for now... but more information, including how to take up the offer, will be available soon!

What's On Theatre: January - March

January:

Ballet Shoes *National Theatre (The Olivier)*
Audio Described: Thu 30th January at 19:00

February:

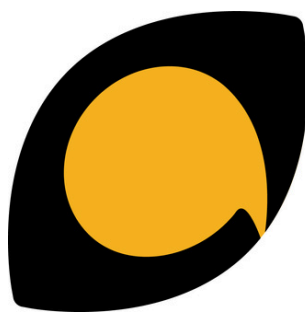
Les Misérables: *Sondheim Theatre, London*
Audio Described: Sat 8 February at 14:30
Touch Tour: 12:30 (Vocal Eyes)

Titanique: *Criterion Theatre, London*
Audio Described: Sun 9 February at 15:00
Touch Tour: TBC (Vocal Eyes)

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe:
Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff
Audio Described: Sat 15 February at 14:30
Touch Tour: TBC (Vocal Eyes)

Birmingham Royal Ballet's Cinderella: *Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre*
Audio Described: Sat 22 February at 14:00
Touch Tour: 12:00 (Sightlines – Jonathan Nash & Julia Grundy)

& Juliet: *Curve, Leicester*
Audio Described: Sat 22 February at 14.15
Touch Tour: 12.15 (Vocal Eyes)



Audio Description Association

"The RNIB and LADS: Pioneering the Birth of Audio Description in the UK"

An article by ADA Life Member, Mary Lambert.

Looking back on the transformative journey of audio description in the UK, it is hard to imagine a time when the idea of describing the action on stage or screen for visually impaired people was unthinkable, and largely unknown. This is the story of how the RNIB, the London Audio Description Service (LADS), and countless passionate individuals brought the world of theatre and performance to life for those who could not see it.

The catalyst for this movement came in July 1982 when I read an article from the *In Touch Bulletin* to my friend Monique Raffray, who was totally blind. The article described an exciting new experiment being piloted at the Arena Stage Theatre in Washington, DC. "For the first time, blind and visually impaired theatre-goers were offered live commentary through headphones, alongside pre-recorded programme notes. The theatre-goers could now hear the action unfolding between the dialogue, giving them an experience of the performance they had never had before".

Monique, "a passionate theatre-goer", was instantly captivated. Neither of us had any training in theatre accessibility, but we were determined to explore the possibility of introducing a similar system to the UK.

In 1985, after months of meetings and correspondence with key figures such as Margaret and Cody Pfanstiehl, the architects behind the Washington DC project, an article by Monique Raffray entitled 'The Play's the Thing' was published in *The British Journal of Visual Impairment* (Autumn 1985). Following this, in January 1986, Chris Atrill, the RNIB's Leisure Officer, arranged a pivotal meeting at the RNIB's Great Portland Street offices, where the idea of setting up an audio description service in the UK was discussed.

This meeting marked the official beginning of the RNIB's Audio Description Advisory Group - but there was no clear roadmap. How could we bring this idea to life without trainers, equipment, or even a real understanding of what was required? The challenges were immense, but so was the enthusiasm.

This Advisory Group continued to meet regularly, and in September 1987, they hosted the first Audio Description Workshop, with visually impaired people and sighted individuals working on the video 'A Room with a View'. Soon several theatres, including the Duke of York's Theatre, London, and the Theatre Royal, Windsor, showed interest. However, there were still many hurdles to overcome, from the lack of dedicated soundproof booths for describers, to the challenge of finding individuals to deliver the service.



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk

What's On Theatre: January - March

March:

A Good House: Bristol Old Vic, Bristol

Audio Described: Sat 1 March at
14:30

Touch Tour: 12:30

Cabaret at The Kit Kat Club:

Playhouse Theatre, London
Audio Described: Tue 4 March at
19:30

Touch Tour: 17:30 (Vocal Eyes)

Mrs. Doubtfire: Shaftesbury Theatre, London

Audio Described: Tue 4 March at
19:30

Touch Tour: 17:30 (Final AD
performance before closure – Vocal
Eyes)

Tiny Fragments of Beautiful

**Light: Birmingham Repertory
Theatre**

Audio Described: Wed 5 March at
19:45

Touch Tour: 18:45 (Carolyn Smith &
Julia Grundy)

Birmingham Royal Ballet's

Cinderella: Lowry, Salford
Audio Described: Sat 8 March at
14:00

Touch Tour: 12:00

MJ The Musical: Prince Edward Theatre, London

Audio Described: Sat 8 March at
14:30

Touch Tour: TBC (Vocal Eyes)

Stranger Things: The First

Shadow: Phoenix Theatre, London
Audio Described: Sun 9 March at
15:00

Touch Tour: 13:00 (Vocal Eyes –
Miranda Yates)

Oedipus: Old Vic Theatre, London

Audio Described: Mon 10 March at
19:30

Inside No. 9 – StagelFright:

Wyndham's Theatre, London
Audio Described: Thu 13 March at
14:30

Touch Tour: TBC



Audio Description Association

The Birth of AD article continued....

Despite these challenges, progress was being made. By 1988, the first full-scale audio- described performance of 'Stepping out' was held at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. The enthusiasm and commitment of local volunteers, like Joanna Lukes (the local Mobility Officer), were key to the success of these early initiatives. As momentum grew, the RNIB played a central role in educating and training people across the UK by hosting workshops, and seminars; and eventually establishing the foundations for a formal training programme.

In January 1990 the London Audio Description Service (LADS) was formally established, with Monique as Chair. At the same time, the RNIB received grants from the Arts Council and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which allowed Joanna Lukes from Windsor and Diana Hull from LADS, to embark on a study visit to Boston and Washington, DC. Their time in the US was invaluable, giving them firsthand insights into the development of audio description in both theatre and television.

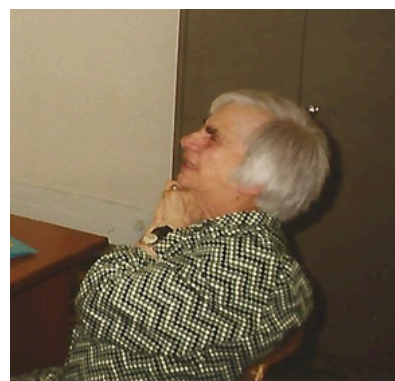
The first audio description service was officially launched in 1991 at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, followed by the National Theatre, and later the RSC. The first National Conference on Audio Description was held in 1997 at the Nottingham Playhouse. This was a moment of celebration and reflection on the incredible progress made since that first meeting in 1986.

As we look back on these formative years, it is clear that the RNIB's role in championing audio description was nothing short of revolutionary.

As fellow ADA Life Member, Mary Plackett aptly put it, "The RNIB can truly be described as the godmother of British audio description." We owe a great deal to the vision, passion, and determination of those who were involved in those early days – from the RNIB through Chris Atrill, and later Marcus Weisen's, unwavering support - to the countless volunteers and professionals who dedicated their time and expertise to bringing audio description to life.

The story of audio description in the UK is one of persistence and collaboration. Today, audio description for theatre, film and television is an integral part of the cultural landscape, and as we continue to push forward, it is important to remember the brave pioneers who, in the early 1980s, took that first bold step into the unknown.

By Mary Lambert, January 2025



Monique Raffray -
Chair of LADS in January 1990



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk

**What's On
Theatre:**

March Continued:

Alterations: National Theatre
(Lyttelton Theatre)
Audio Described: Sat 15th March at
14.30 & Friday 28th March 19:30

Tambo & Bones: Royal and
Derngate
Audio Described: Sat 15 March at
14.30
Touch Tour 13.30

Hamlet: RSC - Stratford Upon Avon
Audio Described: 8th and 13th
March at 13:00
Touch Tours to be selected upon
booking tickets.

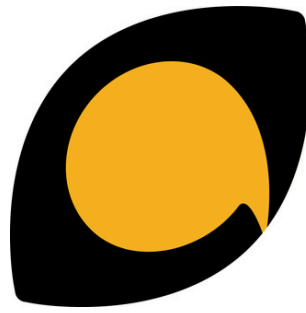
Shirley Valentine
Everyman Theatre, Liverpool,
Audio Described: Friday 14 Mar at
19:30
Touch tour 18:45pm

Edward II: RSC - Stratford Upon
Avon
Audio Described: 15th Mar at 13.30
and 21st March at 19:30
Touch Tours to be selected upon
booking tickets.

Punch: Young Vic, London
Audio Described: Fri 14th Mar at
19:30
Touch tour 18:00
Sat: 22 Mar at 14:30
Touch Tour: 13:00
(Miranda Yates and Eleanor
Margolies)

Cruel Intentions: Royal and
Derngate
Audio Described: Wed 19th March
at 19.30
Touch Tour: 18.30

A Streetcar Named Desire
Crucible Theatre, Sheffield
Audio Described: Sat 29 March at
14:00 (Hear The Picture.)



Audio Description Association

Eleanor Stollery's Groundbreaking Experience as an Audio Describer for "Ballet Shoes"

*Based on an article by Tim Stollery - AKA
Eleanor's Dad*

We are delighted to see Eleanor Stollery continuing her pioneering work in audio description. At just 13 years old, Eleanor has already made an incredible impact, and we previously featured her work on *The Witches* at The National Theatre.

This year, she brought her talents to *Ballet Shoes*, once again delivering an outstanding audio-described performance.

Supported by professional audio describers Ess Grange and Andrew Holland, Eleanor used a braille script and a foot pedal system to ensure a seamless and engaging experience for blind and VI audiences. Reflecting on her experience, Eleanor shared:

"It was incredible to be trusted with such an important role again this year. I know how much AD means to blind and VI audiences, and I wanted to make sure they could enjoy *Ballet Shoes* as much as anyone else. With the right tools and support, we can create a truly inclusive theatre experience."



Her dedication has also inspired change within The National Theatre itself. David Bellwood, Head of Access, praised Eleanor's contribution:

"Eleanor's dedication and professionalism continue to inspire us. Her contributions have prompted our team to explore new ways to support visually impaired audio describers, making theatre more accessible for all." Eleanor's innovative approach, using embossed braille scripts and a hands-free cueing system, highlights the importance of adaptable solutions in AD delivery. Her work not only enhances accessibility but also showcases how lived experience can shape and refine the way theatre is described. By championing inclusivity from such a young age, Eleanor is helping to break down barriers and set new standards for the future of audio description in the arts. We can't wait to see what she does next!"



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk

What's On Museum Spaces:

Descriptive Event – Drawing the Italian Renaissance:
Buckingham Palace, The King's Gallery, London
Audio Described: Tue 11 February at 13:45

Audio Art: Utterly in the Picture
National Gallery, London
Tuesday 11 February - sessions start from 13:00.

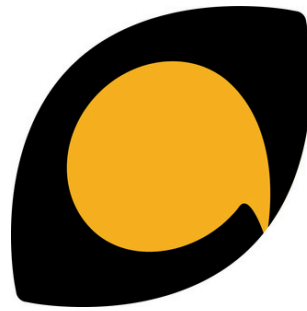
What's On Film: The Brutalist:



[See the trailer here:](#)

A message from ADA Exec member, Veronika Hyks:

“The Brutalist opens in the UK on the 24th January. Yes, it is 215 minutes long but there is an intermission, a revival perhaps of an old and honourable tradition and it’s a very absorbing, beautifully executed story told on an epic scale with marvellous music... and the AD is by Veronika Hyks, whoever she might be! :)”



Audio Description Association



How the EAA Will Transform Businesses?

Accessibility is no longer an optional extra—it’s becoming a legal necessity!!! Woohoo!!! The European Accessibility Act (EAA), set to take full effect by 28 June 2025, aims to create a more inclusive society by ensuring that essential products and services are accessible to all, particularly people with disabilities. This directive mandates changes across various industries, and businesses that fail to comply risk significant penalties.

This major legal shift will directly impact our work, the companies we collaborate with, and, most importantly, the people we aim to serve. The EAA isn’t just another set of regulations—it’s a game-changer reinforcing the importance of accessible services across multiple industries. While it doesn’t directly impact every UK business (hello Brexit!), those who sell products and provide services to EU customers must comply.

What the EAA Covers:

The EAA affects a range of essential products and services, ensuring that individuals with visual, auditory, motor, and cognitive impairments can access them without barriers.

Technology & Digital Devices:

Smartphones, tablets, computers, laptops, and TV equipment must be accessible.

Banking & Financial Services: ATMs, banking apps, and online payment systems must accommodate diverse user needs.

Public Information & Communication Services: Websites, e-books, ticketing platforms, and online shopping sites must meet accessibility standards.

Transport Services: Ticketing and check-in machines at transport hubs must be designed with all users in mind.

Businesses with less than 10 employees and an annual turnover / balance sheet less than €2 million will be exempt.

What Businesses Need to Do

For businesses, complying with the EAA involves integrating universal design principles to ensure usability for all customers.

Key requirements include:

Accessible Communication: Information must be available in multiple formats, including audio, large text, braille, and assistive technology-compatible digital formats.

User-Friendly Interfaces: Products and services must be operable through screen readers, voice commands, and alternative input methods

Compliant Digital Content: Websites and online platforms must meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standards.

Inclusive Customer Support: Businesses must provide accessible complaint and support channels, such as text relay services and sign language interpretation.



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk



What's On TV:

The Ink Black Heart - BBC iPlayer - Cormoran Strike Detective Series.

Call the Midwife - Series 14 - BBC iPlayer.

The Split Barcelona - BBC iPlayer.

Playing Nice - ITV X - gripping psychological thriller starring James Norton

Vera Final Series - ITV X - Featuring Brenda Blethyn

Archie: the man who became Cary Grant - ITV X

North Shore - ITV X

Celebrity Bear Hunt - Netflix

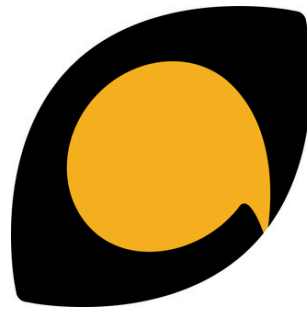
Black Doves - Netflix - featuring Keira Knightly.

Queer Eye - Netflix - structured Reality TV

Squid Game - New Series - Netflix

Detective Cross - Amazon Prime - Based on James Patterson's novels

Shrinking - Apple TV+ Comedy



Audio Description Association

The Business Case for Accessibility

While some businesses may see compliance as a challenge, the EAA presents substantial opportunities:

Growing Market Reach: More than 87 million Europeans live with disabilities. Ensuring accessibility allows businesses to tap into this significant consumer base.

Enhanced Brand Reputation: Companies prioritising inclusivity foster customer loyalty and positive public perception.

Avoiding Penalties: Non-compliance can lead to fines of up to €250,000 in some countries and prison sentences.

A Competitive Advantage: Businesses that implement accessibility measures early will gain a competitive advantage over those that delay compliance.

How Businesses Can Prepare

With the 2025 deadline approaching, businesses should act now. Key steps include:

- 1. Conduct an Accessibility Audit** – Identify product, service, website, and customer support barriers.
- 2. Develop an Action Plan** – Outline a strategy, set a timeline, and allocate a budget for necessary changes.
- 3. Invest in Training & Technology** – Educate staff on accessibility requirements and implement assistive technologies.
- 4. Consult with Accessibility Experts** – Work with specialists, disability organisations, and legal advisors to ensure compliance.
- 5. Test with Disabled Users** – Gather real-world feedback to improve usability and effectiveness.
- 6. Monitor and Update Compliance Measures** – Regularly assess and adapt strategies in line with technological advancements and regulatory updates.

The Road Ahead

The EEA is a game-changer for inclusivity in business. While compliance requires investment, the long-term benefits—from customer satisfaction to legal protection—make it worthwhile. Companies that take accessibility seriously will meet legal standards and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

For those in the AD and accessibility sector, the EEA reinforces the importance of their work. By supporting businesses in their compliance journey, they play a crucial role in shaping a more accessible future for everyone.

Want to Dive Deeper?

- Browse the complete [EAA documentation](#) here:
- Start conversations in your professional networks and ask relevant businesses if they're ready for the EAA deadline.
- Advocate and offer constructive feedback and review your customer's current accessibility practices.

Ready to Lead the Accessibility Revolution?

The clock is ticking! Don't wait until June 2025 to get started. Start your accessibility journey now – your future customers, brand reputation, and legal compliance depend on it. Reach out, get informed, and be a champion of inclusive design!

Let's make accessibility the new standard – together!

Legal Disclaimer

This article provides general information about the EAA and does not constitute legal advice. Consult a legal professional for specific compliance guidance.



Follow

Email: info@audiodescription.co.uk