

Symposium program

Monday
23 November 2026

The Lantern, Curtin University, Perth, and online

Audio, Accessibility and AI

The final symposium of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery project **Diversifying Audio Description in Australia: Past, Present and Future**.

Time

9 am to 4 pm, Perth time (AWST). Registration from 8:30 am.

Venue

The Lantern, Level 7, TL Robertson Library (Building 105), Curtin University, Bentley

Format

Hybrid. Join us in person or online (Zoom).

Access

Live captions in the venue. Access and Inclusion Guide at the back of this program.

Curtin University

Funded by the Australian Research Council
Discovery Project DP240103045

Welcome

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Format	Hybrid. Join us in person or online (Zoom).

Contact

For access requests or questions on the day, contact Kathryn Locke.

Email	k.locke@curtin.edu.au
Phone	0403 477 955

Access and inclusion

- The Access and Inclusion Guide for The Lantern is included at the end of this program.
- Live captions will be provided at the venue.
- Staff will be assisting with wayfinding on the day. Please contact us for specific assistance.

Order of the day

Sessions run in this order. Morning and afternoon tea and lunch are provided.

1. Registration, from 8:30 am
2. Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country
3. Official opening
4. Keynote address: Gerard Goggin
5. Morning tea
6. Panel 1: Users, Audiences and Co-creation, with Shaun Croner, Edwina Gustafson and Sarah Empey
7. Presentation: Kylie Sturgess
8. Presentation: Md Fahad Bin Zamal
9. Presentation: Olivia Johnston Riley (presenting online)
10. Lunch
11. Live demonstration: Audio Described Aotearoa (presenting online)
12. Presentation: Sarah Barron
13. Presentation: Collin Bjork
14. Presentation: Polly Goodwin
15. Afternoon tea
16. Panel 2: A response to the AD legislation announcement, with Jonathan Craig, Lauren Henley and Francois Jacobs
17. Closing reflections
18. Symposium close

Acknowledgements

This symposium is part of and funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery project Diversifying Audio Description in Australia: Past, Present and Future (DP240103045).

The full program, with abstracts and speaker biographies, follows.

Program: morning

Registration and arrival

Registration opens at 8:30 am on Level 7 of the TL Robertson Library. Directions are in the Access and Inclusion Guide at the end of this program.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country

Chair: Professor Tama Leaver

Official opening

Keynote address

Distinguished Professor Gerard Goggin

Sounding Out Digital Citizenship and Disability: Reflections on the Audio, Accessibility and AI Conjuncture

Abstract

After a long, complicated, and uneven gestation the area of audio accessibility has come into its own, as the case of audio description shows. Audio accessibility, shaped by its matrix in disability media, is a creative, vibrant, central area of wider media, communications, information, and contemporary culture. In this talk, I take the opportunity to reflect upon audio and accessibility, and the exciting research that critically studies it, to consider its implications for digital citizenship and disability in the

AI moment.

About Gerard Goggin

Gerard Goggin is Distinguished Professor in the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, Honorary Professor in the Centre for Disability Research and Policy, University of Sydney, and an Associate Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society. His books include Digital Transactions (2027; with Adrian Athique), Mobile Media Methods (2024, with Larissa Hjorth), Apps (2021), the co-edited Routledge Companion to Disability and Media (2020), Disability and the Media (2015, with Katie Ellis), and with the late Christopher Newell Disability in Australia (2005) and Digital Disability (2003). With various colleagues he is undertaking the ARC Discovery project Disability and Digital Citizenship.

Morning tea

Refreshments are provided.

Panel 1

Users, Audiences and Co-creation

Chair: Professor Tama Leaver

Panellists: Shaun Croner, Edwina Gustafson and Sarah Empey

Shaun Croner

Who Decides What Matters? Reimagining Audio Description for Agency and Effective Participation

Abstract

Audio description has traditionally been understood as a way of providing access to visual information. It has transformed participation in film, television, theatre, museums and other cultural settings by making visual information more accessible. Discussions of audio description, however, have often focused on access itself, rather than the degree of control users have over how visual information is interpreted, curated and conveyed.

This paper will argue that agency is an underexplored dimension of audio description. While access is essential, effective participation requires more than the availability of information. It requires the ability to engage with visual information in ways that reflect the user's objectives, expertise and context. What constitutes a useful description is therefore contingent upon purpose. The same visual material may generate different informational needs depending on whether the user is seeking cultural engagement, education, professional analysis or decision-making.

Drawing on emerging scholarship concerning personalised, adaptive and user-directed audio description, this paper will consider how developments in artificial intelligence create new possibilities for user agency. Rather than receiving a single, static description, users may increasingly be able to shape the descriptive experience in ways that reflect their own purposes, interests and informational needs.

The paper proposes a shift from access-centred models of audio description towards a framework grounded in agency and effective participation. Such a shift recognises that the value of a description lies not only in its availability, but in its capacity to support users to engage with visual information on their own terms. In the age of AI, the question may no longer be simply how visual information should be described, but who should decide what matters.

About Shaun Croner

Shaun Croner is a Solicitor Advocate at the NSW Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and an MPhil candidate in Law at UNSW, researching the effective participation of lawyers with disability in criminal courts. Drawing on

his professional background in law and human rights, together with his lived experience of vision impairment, Shaun has a particular interest in accessibility, autonomy and effective participation. His contribution to the symposium explores how audio description can move beyond providing access to information.

Edwina Gustafson

Beyond the Data Dump: The Case for Blind Humans-in-the-Loop in AI-Generated Audio Description

Abstract

Australia's new AD mandates risk sparking an industry rush towards AI for rapid scalable accessibility. However, relying on automation alone exposes a fundamental misunderstanding of the craft. Effective AD provides narrative access, whereas AI generates inventories of visual elements, or "data dumps." This presentation argues that to truly serve users, AI-generated AD must shift from simply listing visuals to narrative curation, a transformation most effectively guided by blind lived experience.

Blind and low-vision individuals possess an enhanced cognitive skill for zeroing in on essential information, a capacity developed by navigating environments through high-value sensory cues. This aptitude is well-documented across disability studies and neuroscience.

Drawing on my practice as a legally blind AD scripter, I will demonstrate this skill via short video comparisons. Australian television AD is in its infancy. We have a unique window to establish a gold standard: blind lived experience guiding the technology, not merely testing it.

About Edwina Gustafson

Edwina Gustafson is a legally blind audio description writer contracting to SBS Television Australia. She champions blind lived experience as the foundation for true media accessibility, and has a paper forthcoming on this topic in the peer-reviewed Journal of Audiovisual Translation. Edwina also

freelances as a digital accessibility tester and sits on the board of disability service provider Vivability Limited. She is a dedicated student of Braille literacy and is fluent in French, as well as her native English.

Sarah Empey

Abstract

“The truly amazing benefits of having audio descriptions in galleries and museums is not only an ‘eye-opening’ experience for the blind and low vision community, but for the sighted community as well!”

About Sarah Empey

Sarah Empey is legally blind and currently co-designs and consults with art galleries and museums across Australia including QUT Art Museum, Museum of Brisbane, Verge Gallery, and the National Gallery of Australia. With lived experience and a background in accessible and inclusive design, Sarah has set her “sights” on audio description to bring art to the blind and low-vision community. Having grown up in Calgary, Canada, Sarah currently lives in Brisbane and is now fluent in both Canadian and Australian.

Presentation

Dr Kylie Sturgess

Synthetic intimacy and situated voice: AI audio overviews and the accessibility of local Perth media

Abstract

AI audio tools such as Google’s NotebookLM are increasingly framed as accessibility aids, offering on-demand audio summaries of documents and media. Yet Rettberg (2026) shows that NotebookLM normalises culturally specific content into generic American English, a process she terms “cultural mistranslation”. This study extends her synthetic probe method to Perth

community media. Episodes of RTRFM's Artbeat, Curtin FM's Let's Talk Gardening and The Battler podcast, a Murdoch University news article and an empty PDF were fed into NotebookLM's Audio Overview, and the outputs analysed against the originals. Using Lindgren's (2023) account of podcast hyper-intimacy as a benchmark, and Fraser's counterpublics framework (1990), I argue that genuine accessibility in AI audio requires not only technical availability but cultural fidelity: preserving the situated voice that makes community media meaningful to its audience. Tools that promise to widen access might otherwise narrow the cultural range of what is heard.

About Kylie Sturgess

Dr Kylie Sturgess is a Lecturer in the School of Media and Communication at Murdoch University, Perth, and a postgraduate student in News and Entertainment Media at Edith Cowan University. Her research spans podcasting, radio and Australian paranormal and pseudoscientific beliefs.

Presentation

Md Fahad Bin Zamal

Can AI Describe What We See? Exploring Audio Description for Animated Media

Abstract

Audio description makes visual media accessible to people who are blind or have low vision by translating important visual information into spoken narration. However, generating meaningful descriptions automatically remains challenging, particularly for animated content involving rapid movements, expressive characters, and complex visual storytelling.

The study explores a context-aware AI framework for generating audio descriptions of animated media, using Tom and Jerry cartoons as a case study. The framework integrates character detection, tracking, emotion

recognition, and multimodal language models to produce descriptions informed by visual and narrative context.

Drawing on evaluations involving sighted participants and people who are blind or have low vision, the study compares AI-generated descriptions with professional audio description. It highlights the capabilities and limitations of current AI systems and discusses how human-centred evaluation can guide the development of more accessible, contextually meaningful audio description technologies.

About Md Fahad Bin Zamal

Md Fahad Bin Zamal is a PhD researcher in the Human-Centric AI Group at Curtin University. His research focuses on using artificial intelligence to improve media accessibility for people who are blind or have low vision. His PhD explores the development of context-aware automated audio description for animated content, integrating computer vision, emotion recognition, and multimodal AI. His work combines technological innovation with user perspectives to explore more inclusive and accessible ways of experiencing animated media.

Presentation (online)

Dr Olivia Johnston Riley

TTS and Podfic: Fandom Navigates Human and AI Audio Access

Abstract

In fandom, some users prefer to use text-to-speech (TTS) and other AI-powered technologies to access fan texts, while others prefer podfic, fanfiction read aloud by passionate communities of fellow fans as part of artistic practice. Podfic practices among variously dis/abled fans model how important it is to consider criteria beyond technical accessibility when developing best audio accessibility practices, especially regarding AI. Human

workers alone cannot meet all access needs, but hegemonic reliance on AI tools can pressure disabled users to bend their bodyminds toward the functioning of the machine, rather than receive access tailored to their positionality and aesthetic preferences. Fandom demonstrates a possible path forward where non-disabled fans become more comfortable with previously disability-access-focused technologies like TTS and disabled fans receive more active optioning for their accessibility needs.

About Olivia Johnston Riley

Olivia Johnston Riley earned their PhD in Media & Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They study disability and queerness in speculative media, as well as how fans of these media take up, interpret, and transform these texts. They have been published in the Journal of Cinema and Media Studies, Participations, and the Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, and recently co-edited a special issue on Disability and Fandom for Transformative Works and Cultures.

The program continues with lunch and the afternoon sessions.

Program: afternoon

Lunch

Refreshments are provided.

Live demonstration (online)

Audio Described Aotearoa

Chair: Professor Mike Kent

Presenters: Nicola Owen and Paul Brown, with Brad Cohen

From Audio Description to Braille surtitles: the choice is yours!

Abstract

This session gives a live demonstration of how the New Zealand Opera, Auckland Theatre Company and other arts organisations are using the contexts.live online interface to provide a range of outputs selected by the user, including:

- real-time surtitles or subtitles in your choice of language, to the surtitle screen, your personal screen or a Braille device
- recorded description delivered in real time for live performance
- written description to your screen or Braille device.

Delivering audio via Auracast transmission also means that people can access the audio feed directly via hearing aids or Auracast-enabled headphones. This creates a particular opportunity to enhance access for Deafblind people by offering a single Auracast feed mixing stage sound and audio description, delivered directly through hearing aids.

The benefits:

- a single system that works for blind, Deafblind, low vision and hearing impaired users
- the option for Braille readers to receive both Braille surtitles and written description in Braille, so they can focus on the music
- people can access everything using their own devices, so there is no need to arrive early to pick up headsets.

We will take you through the basics of contexts.live and Auracast and demonstrate how they increase and enhance access for blind, Deafblind, low vision and hearing impaired users when used together.

About Nicola Owen

Nicola Owen is one of the first trained audio describers in New Zealand. She has been audio describing since 2011 and has described live shows including ballet, contemporary dance, musicals, opera and awards ceremonies. For the past two years Nicola and her colleagues have been collaborating with contexts.live and NZ Opera. Nicola runs Audio Described Aotearoa Ltd along with her partner and co-facilitator Paul.

About Paul Brown

Paul Brown, originally from Scotland, is a disability activist, Chair of the Auckland branch of Blind Citizens NZ and Director of BrailleIt NZ and Audio Described Aotearoa. Paul is an enthusiastic audio description user and reviewer and a staunch advocate for the use of Braille.

About Brad Cohen

Brad Cohen is the Tumu Whakarae, General Director of New Zealand Opera, and previously served as Artistic Director of West Australian Opera from 2015 to 2018. Brad grew up in Sydney before studying at Oxford University, the Royal College of Music, and the Royal Northern College of Music. He first came to public attention when, a year after winning the 1994 Leeds Conductor’s Competition, he conducted the world premiere of Thomas Adès’

Powder her Face. He is an experienced musician and music technologist, having founded startups including Tido, Libmus and contexts.live, and has worked internationally as a conductor leading the London Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Stuttgarter Philharmoniker, English National Opera and New York City Opera, among others.

Presentation

Sarah Barron

From Aspiration to Expectation: Audio Description in Art Galleries

Abstract

Artwork audio descriptions (AD) are essential for people who are blind or have low vision to experience art and they have sensory benefits for all. Yet the provision of artwork AD in Australian art galleries and museums is not commonplace and typically offered as a live tour or recording of a small selection of exhibited artworks. There is the potential for AD to move from a perceived accessibility 'add on' to an integral part of the continual and essential evolution of galleries and creative practice (Soler Gallego, 2022). This presentation draws on analysis of the current practices, challenges, and experiences of artwork AD from a national survey with museum professionals (Rieger et al. 2026) and interviews with AD creators and users. Emerging findings from this PhD research project provide insights into how artwork AD can shift from an aspiration to an integrated part of gallery work that visitors can expect.

About Sarah Barron

Sarah Barron (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the Queensland College of Art and Design, Griffith University. Her research and freelance practice focus on access and inclusion through co-designed audio descriptions in galleries and museums. With over 15 years of experience in the visual arts sector, Sarah

has held primarily engagement roles in art galleries and organisations, and served on arts committees, including the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, Queensland branch.

Presentation

Dr Collin Bjork

Beware the Siren Song of Accessible Audio When It's Sung by Extractive AI

Abstract

This presentation defines "extractive AI" and uses the example of Otter.ai to illustrate how some AI systems claim to improve accessibility while at the same time exposing users to the logics of extraction that seek to exploit their knowledge, language, and culture for corporate gain. The presenter then provides a contrasting example of an AI transcription tool developed by Indigenous experts in Aotearoa New Zealand that operates according to different, non-extractive ideologies. The presentation calls on audio practitioners, teachers, and researchers to beware the siren song of AI accessibility when it is sung by extractive AI companies. Instead, the presenter argues for the importance of collaborating locally to build accessible audio-AI systems according to non-extractive ideologies.

About Collin Bjork

Collin Bjork is a Senior Lecturer at Massey University in Aotearoa New Zealand. Trained in rhetoric, Collin researches podcasting, artificial intelligence, and digital communication. He has won Fulbright grants to Slovenia and Montenegro. Collin is writing a book about true crime podcasting. He also produces the Pod Uni podcast.

Presentation

Polly Goodwin

Human versus Robot: Challenging AI to match human decision-making expertise in the creation of AD

Abstract

In 2026, Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays diverse and expanding roles in the creation of audio description (AD). Applications of AI span the AD workflow. It began with the use of synthetic voices but now, the once-assumed safe space for human involvement, scripting, is being tackled (with varying degrees of competency and effectiveness) by a range of developers. These often promise AD that is faster and cheaper to create than the human-powered equivalent, along with customisation options, thanks to AI's involvement at the mixing stage, to tailor AD to the user's needs and preferences, ultimately leading to more AD for more people in more places. This is an exciting and promising time to be an AD user and researcher.

However, as a professional (human) audio describer, I have a series of challenges to present to my AI equivalent before I hang up my hat for good.

An explanation of how 'computer vision models' work details a process of identifying "objects, people, actions, settings, ... on-screen text ... emotional expressions, body language, and spatial relationships between elements". Once done, the model "generates descriptive text that is concise, informative, ... appropriately timed ... and prioritize the most important visual information", to then be vocalised by a synthetic voice.

But what about making decisions about when the AD should override the dialogue? When AD can play 'tag team' with onscreen dialogue and narration? Picking up on the way an object, place or person is referenced within the media, or emphasising through vocal delivery a nuance (perhaps contradictory to a surface reading of images) that enables an audience to take part in a shared subtext or 'in joke'. Or even catching opportunities to

make explicit incidental learning?

Putting aside for now the vexed ethical questions about how, where and why we (should) value human input, this presentation will dissect some of the decision-making processes human audio describers go through to create AD, providing a curriculum of learning for AI to master to achieve human-quality AD.

About Polly Goodwin

Polly Goodwin is a professional audio describer, who has created audio description for anything from a 1916 silent film to a 21st century videogame. Alongside her day job audio describing broadcast television, cinema, streamed content, live presentations, and galleries, she is a PhD candidate at Curtin University, researching the optimisation of AD for older adults. She has contributed journal articles and book chapters on the subject of audio description and visual impairment, and presents at conferences internationally. She is collaborating on projects to develop audio description within Sri Lanka, and to devise a more authentic version of accessible silent cinema.

Afternoon tea

Refreshments are provided.

Panel 2

A response to the AD legislation announcement

Moderator: Professor Katie Ellis

Panellists: Jonathan Craig, Lauren Henley and Francois Jacobs

A moderated discussion, followed by questions from the audience.

About Jonathan Craig

Jonathan Craig is the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Vision 2020, the national peak body for the blindness, low vision and eye health sector. He also works as a freelance accessibility consultant, providing input and advice on audio description for live events. From 2018 to 2021 he was Editor of the national quarterly magazine for Blind Citizens Australia, where he covered the launch of audio description on national Australian TV.

About Lauren Henley

Lauren Henley is a disability rights advocate and Director of Policy and Advocacy at Assistive Technology Suppliers Australia. She has advocated extensively for audio description on television and in cinemas through her previous work with Blind Citizens Australia. She also brought a successful complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which found that Australia's failure to legislate to introduce minimum targets for audio description on television breached her rights.

About Francois Jacobs

Francois Jacobs is Systemic Advocacy Lead at Blind Citizens Australia, Consumer Representative to the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities, and an Audio Description Quality Control Advisor for SBS. With more than 20 years' experience spanning the higher education, disability, and corporate sectors, he combines lived experience as a dog guide user with a strong evidence-based approach to advancing accessibility, inclusion, and equitable access to media and information.

Closing reflections

Speaker: Professor Katie Ellis

Marking the conclusion of the three-symposium series.

Symposium close

Thank you for joining us.

Access and Inclusion Guide

The Lantern, TL Robertson Library, Curtin University

Curtin University is committed to being accessible and inclusive, providing a space that can be enjoyed by all visitors. This guide explains how to get to the venue, what to expect when you arrive, and who to contact for help. Every map and photo is also described in words.

Curtin staff will be guiding guests to the venue from Taxi Stand 3 (located at the front of Building 501) and Nesuto Curtin Hotel. Please meet at these locations at 8:15 am if you would like to be escorted to the venue.

Getting here

Event venue

The Lantern, TL Robertson Library
Building 105, room 701 (Level 7)

Address

Curtin University
Kent Street, Bentley WA 6102

Maps

The Curtin campus maps help you find your way around campus, including wheelchair accessible routes. You can also use the Map tile in the Curtin elsie app: elsie for iOS or elsie for Android.

The Curtin Perth Access and Inclusion Map (PDF) highlights wheelchair accessible routes, accessible parking and other access features. You can also open The Lantern in MazeMap for step-by-step directions.

Public transport

Curtin Perth has two conveniently located bus stations. Use Transperth to plan your journey.

Parking

Parking is available near the venue in the Pi1 yellow car park. Parking costs $1.68 p/h using the CellOpark app or website.
Free parking is available in designated ACROD bays for holders of current ACROD permits.

Walking from the Pi1 car park to the venue

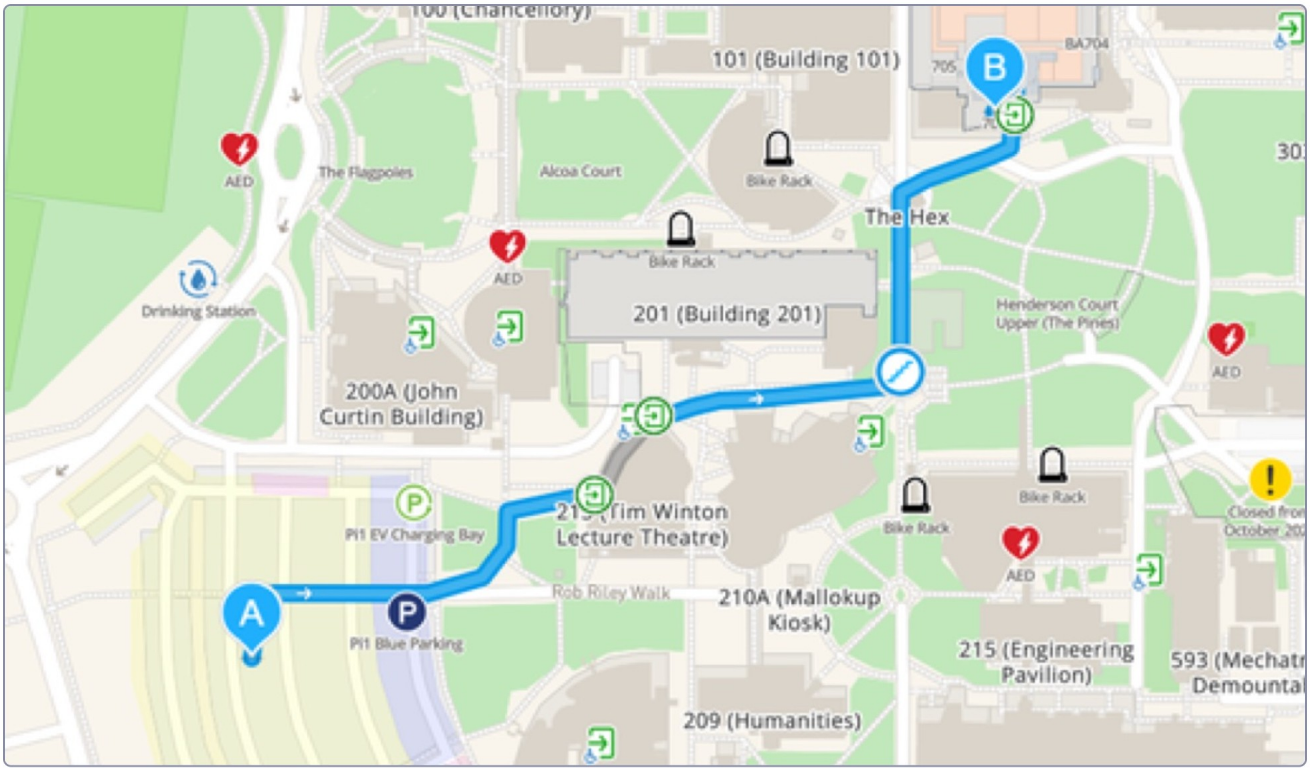
Route in words

1. Start at the Pi1 car park, near Pi1 Blue Parking.
2. Walk east along the path, passing the Tim Winton Lecture Theatre (Building 213) on your right.
3. Continue north-east along the south side of Building 201.
4. At The Hex, turn north and follow the path to the TL Robertson Library (Building 105).

See the walking route in MazeMap.

Map: walking route from the Pi1 car park (A) to the TL Robertson Library (B)

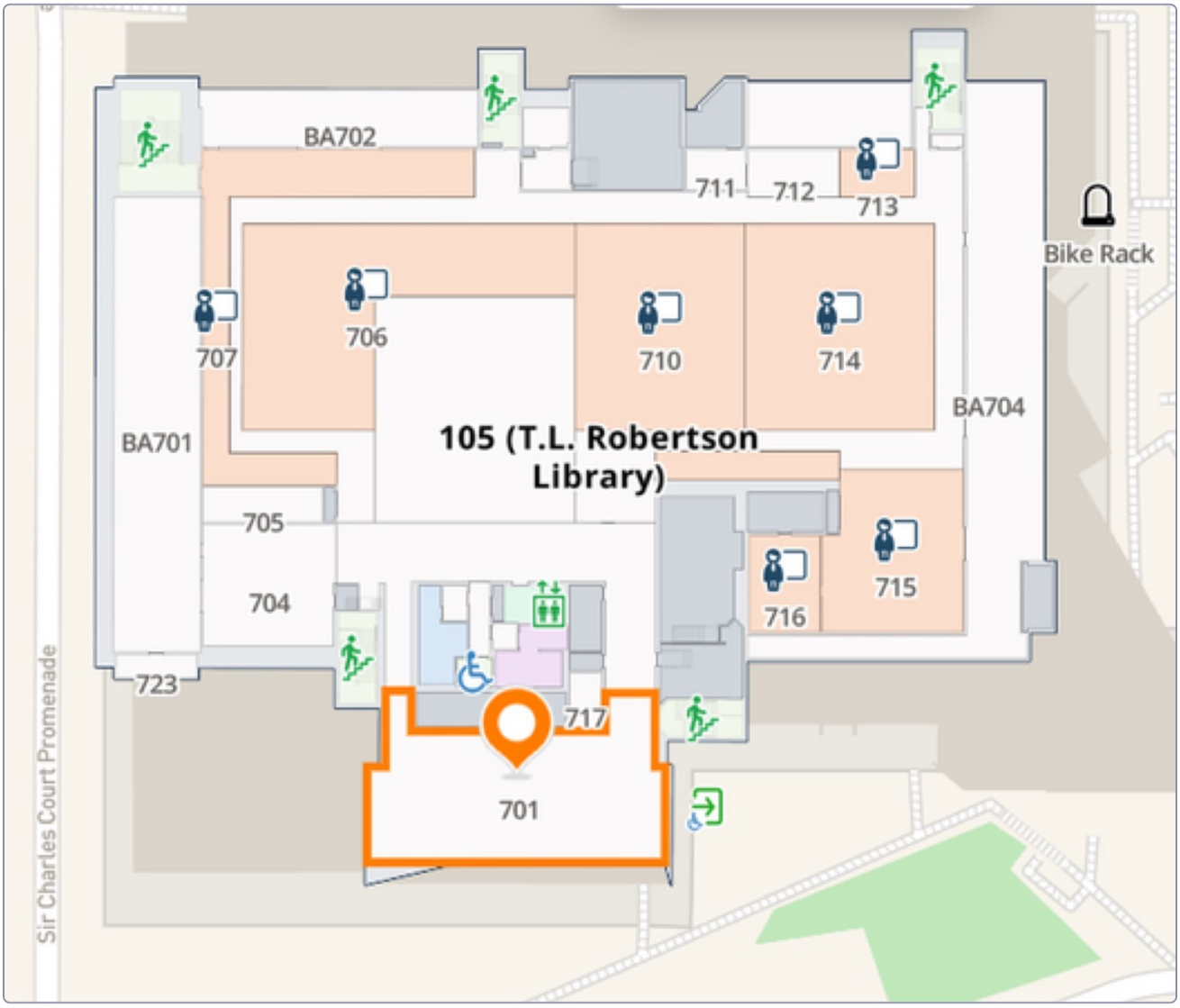
Map: walking route from the P11 car park (A) to the TL Robertson Library (B)



Venue

This event will be held at **The Lantern, TL Robertson Library, Building 105, room 701**. The Lantern is at the southern end of Level 7.

Floor plan: layout of Building 105, Level 7



Entrance

Directional signs will be placed outside the venue. Please take the lifts to Level 7.

Photo: library entrance from the Pi1 car park



Photo: alternate entrance



Registration

When you exit the lifts on Level 7, turn right. Symposium staff will greet you and register you for the event.

Formalities and networking

Formal proceedings and networking will take place in The Lantern. Entry is through the registration area.

Photo: The Lantern with theatre-style seating



Photo: The Lantern with workshop-style seating



Toilets

Toilets, including an accessible toilet, are located near the lifts on Level 7.

Floor plan: Level 7, TL Robertson Library



Quiet room

There is no dedicated quiet room for this event. The Library offers several quiet areas, including Level 6 and the Reading Room on Level 3, which are designated for quiet individual study.

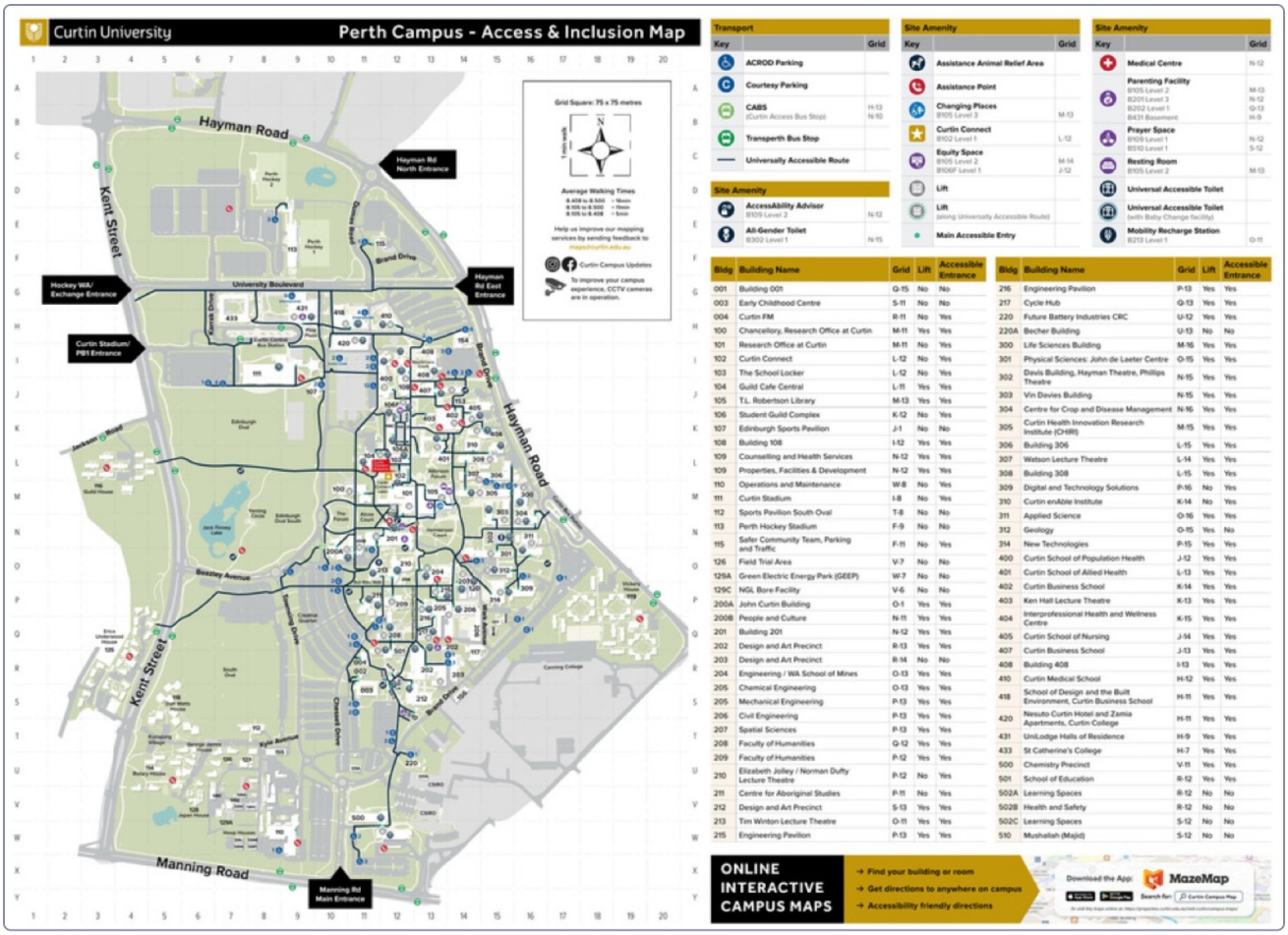
Symposium guests are welcome to use these spaces. If you need help, please ask event staff.

Universally accessible route

The Lantern is a flat-floor venue suitable for wheelchairs and mobility aids.

The Curtin Perth Access and Inclusion Map (PDF) shows universally accessible routes, accessible parking and other key access features. For more on campus access and parking, visit the Curtin campus access and parking page.

Map: Curtin Perth Campus Access and Inclusion Map (reduced; use the link above for the full-size version)



Live captioning

Live captions will be displayed on the screen behind the speakers throughout the event.

Contact

If you have any access requirements, or questions on the day, please contact Kathryn Locke.

Email k.locke@curtin.edu.au

Phone 0403 477 955



Audio, Accessibility and AI symposium
Monday 23 November 2026