
Hearing Disability

Please read this leaflet in conjunction with Advisory Leaflet 9 - Aural and Visual Communication in Churches.

Is your Church accessible to your worshippers with Hearing Disability?

Not hearing what is going on can leave worshippers feeling very left-out. Happily many Churches do invest in a Sound System and make sure that it is operated and maintained properly. That can make a world of difference to the majority of your congregation. But it may not be enough for those with moderate to severe Hearing Disability. What seems perfectly clear for anyone with normal hearing may still not be enough.

Many good sound systems today include a “loop” – indeed, UK Equality legislation requires their installation where reasonably possible. Using aids that are loop-enabled can make a wonderful difference. But please make sure that it is properly set up and working at all times, and remember that if your sound system operator doesn’t themselves use aids with a loop, they can’t know directly whether it is working. Consider having a suitable calibrated testing device, or find volunteer Aid users to check. Please also remember that any electrical system work, especially new LED lighting with dimming, may cause interference, and make sure that the installation contractor takes all necessary steps to make sure that you are not left with this.

A New option

While loop systems have been providing useful service for 50 or more years, they do suffer from technical limitations. With involvement from Hearing-disabled charities the industry has developed a new technology called “Auracast” intended to provide a more reliable and better-quality solution. Commercial shipment of Auracast equipment is now available to Sound System contractors and they are likely to propose including this for new or upgraded installations.

This is likely to be very worthwhile in the long run, but should you rush into it in the short term, and what about your existing working loop system? Hearing Aid suppliers are only just starting to offer Auracast-enabled aids – space and power needs are at a premium in them. Aids in use now without Auracast typically last 5 or more years and users will be reluctant to buy new ones if their loop experience works for them. Whether and when NHS aids start to incorporate Auracast is uncertain. So don’t discard a working loop system just because you’d like to have Auracast. You should be able to use both at the same time without problem.

Additional information and advice is available from the DAC team.

Contact details are available at www.stalbans.anglican.org/dac/who-s-who-in-buildings/.

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With thanks to the Reverend Martin Shaw

May 2025