

DAC Guidance Note: Sound Amplification in Churches

Before preparing your scheme do some research. An excellent booklet, '**Sound Amplification in Churches**' by Revd Dr. Jennifer Zarek, (ISBN 0 7151 7558 0) is available by post from Church House Publishing (0207 898 1300 or www.chbookshop.co.uk) for £3.75 plus postage. It is designed as a guide for parishes wanting to install systems, and includes a helpful checklist of procedure.

Consider your actual needs. Is an induction loop required and will it be used? Who is going to use the sound reinforcement system and for exactly what purpose?

Listen to the result of sound amplification schemes in other churches, and talk to members of their congregations and clergy about the effectiveness of their schemes. Be aware that the interior volume of a church and the materials from which it is constructed will have a critical effect on the final sound, and that what works for one church may not work for another.

Talk to your church architect, who may well be familiar with systems installed in other churches and be able to recommend suitable contractors.

When submitting your proposals for Diocesan Advisory Committee advice:

1. You should include a plan and either an elevation or a section of the church, with the scale marked on it, to enable the Committee to comprehend the volume of the building. If possible, please include some photographs of the interior spaces. Remember that the some members of the DAC may not be familiar with your church building.
2. You should give some idea of the architectural or decorative sensitivity of the building, or whether there are architectural features and details, which may need to be accommodated by cable runs and loudspeaker positions. This information could be included in the '*Statement of Significance*' submitted with your petition.
3. You, or your contractor, must give technical details of the proposed system:
 - (i) The equipment you propose to install with specifications. 'Stylish, yellow, popular and hard-wearing' and other catalogue descriptions are not specifications. The Committee needs to know the full specification of the amplifier, and frequency response and polar patterns of your microphones and loudspeakers. The Committee needs to know the manufacturer and full specification of all the proposed equipment.
 - (ii) Where exactly do you intend to mount the loudspeakers and place the microphones? These can be marked on your plan and photographs.
 - (iii) What is the route of your induction loop cable? This can be marked on the plan of the building.

- (iv) Any information about the mounting of equipment, the colour and route of all cabling and how it is to be fixed. We will almost certainly require a letter from your architect indicating that he has been consulted about, and approves, these details.
4. It is helpful to know why you have chosen a particular contractor or proposal, and whether comparative quotes have been obtained. Occasionally, the committee or its Advisers come across companies who have little or no experience of church systems, and are not aware of the particular sensitivities and challenges of this kind of work.

If you are not planning to include an induction loop in your sound amplification system, you should be aware that the Disability Discrimination Act, which came fully into force in 2004, makes the inclusion of a loop strongly advisable. Your contractor must state that any loop you intend to install (not just the loop amplifier) meets the appropriate British Standard, B.S. 6083. The purchase of a hand-held loop receiver is advised, as it can be used by someone with poor hearing but no hearing aid, and can be used by the church to check that the loop is functioning.

Please remember that the DAC will be happy:

- (i) To supply a list of contractors who have installed systems in other churches,
- (ii) To advise on any quotations received (if you are unsure how to select the best), and
- (iii) To give advice about the most sensitive ways to use sound reinforcement in relation to your building and style of liturgy. If your building is unusually large and complex, or if there are specially challenging circumstances, it may be possible for DAC representatives to make a site visit.

It is often sensible to submit an outline scheme with drawings and photographs at an early stage, and ask the advice of the Committee before committing the Parish to a scheme and submitting a full petition for faculty.

Finally, remember that the DAC office is here to help and to advise, and our aim is to assist you in achieving the most appropriate system for your church and your particular circumstances. We are always happy to discuss your plans and to offer whatever assistance may be appropriate.

Durham Diocesan Advisory Committee

(With thanks to York DAC)

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