



Project Case Study

Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure, Taunton, Somerset

| The Challenge...

To improve access to a range of leisure and learning facilities

| The Solution...

Professional advice and installation services from Gordon Morris Ltd.

| The Benefits...

Better quality for hearing impaired service users.

Service providers face increasing demands to improve access to their facilities. Under the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) many organisations are obliged to make provision for those with disabilities, including hearing impairment. Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure faced such a challenge. As a division of Somerset County Council, the organisation offers a range of flexible opportunities for education

and affordable leisure across the county. They provide courses and activities designed to meet the needs and aspirations of all sectors of the community, from holiday play schemes for children, to challenging educational qualifications for adults.

Gordon Morris Ltd. has helped the organisation to maximise participation at a number of its facilities. The team at Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure felt it was necessary to upgrade and refurbish many of the buildings they are responsible for and obtained funding for extensive works. This included the provision of equipment to improve access for the hearing impaired. With such a strong commitment to meeting the needs of the community, quality and cost-effectiveness were paramount. Gordon Morris Ltd. was able to advise on and install tailored solutions to meet the specific requirements of each venue, succeeding where several other contractors had failed to deliver.

Choosing A Specialist Contractor

Premises and Contracts Manager Barney Forsdike was responsible for the procurement process. *“My role has been to procure the systems... to decide in consultation with our other staff in the service what we actually require”*. Needing to consolidate the work of a number of local centres, the organisation found that a variety of hearing installations and temporary systems by several different companies had already been fitted. Sometimes, these had been installed by subcontractors on larger projects. Some of these proved inadequate, so the work involved a mixture of new installations and replacement of systems which were not meeting learners' needs. *“We had used a couple of other firms in the region... and to be honest the feedback was pretty poor. If you're doing a really substantial remodelling building project and letting it out to a contractor, quite often they organise their own subcontractors... We ended up with systems that either we don't quite understand or that don't seem to work properly or our feedback from clients has been less than good.”*

Barney found that one company stood out: Gordon Morris Ltd. *"I think we've had almost no complaints with any of the installations Gordon Morris has done. That's not been the case with other firms we've used. Having used Gordon Morris once and found that we were getting good feedback from the users of the room we decided it was the best the option to continue using the firm."* As a specialist with over twenty years experience, Gordon Morris Ltd were able to offer a higher quality service, taking care to get things right. *"I think we came to the conclusion after the experience with some of the other firms, that with Gordon Morris... actually you do end up feeling in control. You get what you asked for and you are confident that your clients, your learners, are going to get some equipment that actually meets their needs."*

As Barney points out, this is very different to the service delivered by some other contractors. *"Quite often it has emerged... where the contractor has used a subcontractor who's probably not really up to scratch and doesn't really understand the way that we want to use the rooms, they've fitted an inadequate amplifier, or they've not taken into account that there's interference from metal structures in the ceilings and all these kinds of technical things, which I didn't know about. That was another thing that reinforced my view that we needed to talk to somebody with specialist knowledge of the equipment."*

Understanding the Client's Needs

Mark Birch, Technical Manager at Gordon Morris Ltd, liaised with Barney Forsdike on several occasions, taking the time and care to establish exactly what was required. *"What I found was very useful when talking to Mark is that he asked you the questions about how you wanted to use the rooms and was able to interpret my requirements as the client. Sometimes that's difficult because different tutors have different teaching styles so it's very difficult to get it one hundred percent right."*

The technical staff at Gordon Morris Ltd. were able to take into account the different factors that have an effect on the success of the end solution. *"If you've got a tutor that walks around all the time, or if there are other bits of technical equipment like computers, interactive whiteboards, all of these things have a bearing on how the room's used. And Mark was helpful in spotting this. I think there's probably a tendency by some of the other contractors to think that hearing equipment is just a loop that can be put in by an electrician... life is never that simple, is it?"*

Flexibility was also a key issue for Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure. As Barney points out, *"our buildings are being used for forty weeks of the year, even forty eight weeks of the year, so it is essential that people like your technicians are flexible when it comes to the dates on which equipment can be installed."* Gordon Morris Ltd was able to work around the individual needs of each premises, to minimise any disruption. *"That seems to have worked very well."*

Optimising Performance

One point that Mr. Forsdike is keen to emphasise is the ongoing commitment of Gordon Morris Ltd to ensuring that clients can get the best performance from their investment. *"I find, working in an organisation with several recent changes in staff responsibilities, that it's very important that the people managing the buildings understand what equipment is fitted and how to use it. Our office staff will become aware that there may be a need for a particular piece of equipment to be switched on or to be available for a certain session. If that person can then access details of what equipment is there then its actually hugely beneficial."*

Gordon Morris Ltd. met this need by providing simple user manuals with each installation. *"There are these useful user guides for local managers, so it's all written down and it doesn't rely on one person's memory. To have these kinds of files saying how the equipment works,*

describing what it does and how to operate it at a very simple level...if its written down and can be found easily then it's a huge benefit. That's been one of the big bonuses from my point of view." This attention to the simple little details is one of the key factors that has differentiated Gordon Morris Ltd from other companies Barney has worked with. *"We've not had anything like this provided by other companies".*

So the key lesson from the experience of Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure? When it comes to hearing impairment equipment, using a specialist with a commitment to professional service makes a massive difference. After all, as Barney succinctly puts it: *"It's not something that any old electrical contractor can do."*

Gordon Morris Ltd would like to thank Mr. Forsdike for his kind cooperation with this article and wishes everyone at Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure the very best for the future.

To find out more about what they can offer visit:

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/learning/adult/>