

**Subject:** Disappointment on 4 December 2006

**From:** "Colin B Bennett" <colinbbennett@palmeira.org.uk>

**Date:** Mon, 11 Dec 2006 11:53:21 -0000

**To:** <info@c-h-w.co.uk>

**CC:** "Mark Morris" <mark.morris@rnid.org.uk>, "Barnes, Viv" <Viv.Barnes@rnib.org.uk>, "Sue Brown" <Sue.Brown@sense.org.uk>, "margaret pickess" <margaret.pickess@ntlworld.com>, "Marylin Kilsby" <Marylin.Kilsby@sense.org.uk>

The person responsible for maintenance of Methodist Central Hall, Westminster.

Dear Sir / Madam,

I was one of a large contingent of blind people attending a mass lobby of Parliament on 4 December 2006. We were grateful that you afforded your facilities at Central Hall to us. Your staff made us most welcome.

I have a hearing problem which means that I wear two powerful hearing aids. I am therefore able to make use of induction loops and infra-red systems in premises to enable me to hear clearly. I do campaign on this matter.

I few years ago I attended a similar lobby which started from Central Hall. Sadly, I discovered that there were no in situ induction loops in the building. The organisers of the lobby had laid down a temporary induction loop on the floor. Clearly this situation is intolerable for such a well known and prestigious building. On that day I had a discussion with one of the people responsible for maintenance and it was agreed that things would be improved. Later I was in email correspondence with your office and I learned that major refurbishment was to be undertaken at Central Hall to improve "disability access". If I recall correctly one of your people had a Greek name. I remember that the work was going to be completed in August but I forget which year!

There was a clear understanding that the needs of deaf people would not be overlooked. On 4 December 2006 we were addressed by speakers in the main meeting room. I turned my hearing aid to the 'T' setting but alas no signal was received. By chance, there was a young woman sitting next to me (a stranger to me) who also had hearing aids and she confirmed that there was no signal. I took the matter up with two of the lobby stewards who approached the person responsible for the sound equipment. I was told that he seemed concerned that the equipment was not working and did his best to remedy the situation. However, he was not successful.

I think you will agree that this is a very silly situation. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 reasonable steps should be taken to facilitate access to building for disabled people. Induction loops or similar should be installed in all venues where meetings are held and these should be checked regularly. They should also be switched on ready for meetings. Attenders should not have to ask for them to be turned on.

I am not sure if the organisers of the Lobby checked that an induction loop was turned on. I believe that the speakers did not ask the audience if they could hear and to alert it to the fact that there was an induction loop (as there was). If I am correct on these matters then one could criticise the organisers. It may interest you to know that the House of Commons and also the House of Lords have excellent induction loops not only in the chambers but also in the ancient Westminster Hall. I was able to hear all of the words of the speeches there due to the presence of induction loops.

I have copied this email to Mark Morris who is Parliamentary Officer of the RNID and Viv Barnes who is PA to Colin Low, Chairman of the RNIB - the main organiser of the lobby.

Please to not hesitate to make contact with me. I can hear well on the telephone. We must move forward.....

Yours

Colin Bennett  
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Please use black font if you can (when replying)!