What audio-visual (AV) equipment do we have to support groups?

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Lancaster & Morecambe u3a has equipment kept in various venues around Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham. In the last year, some has been scrapped and new equipment has been bought. This note introduces group leaders to some of what we have and how it could be used.

The spoken word

Until recently, the only way a couple of dozen people could listen to a recording of someone reading a quiz or a book chapter was to use one of several CD players. Although we still have CD players, we also have a JBL cylindrical speaker, kept in the QMH, that can communicate via Bluetooth with a mobile phone. The discussion leader can edit an audio file on their phone and, at the meeting, connect to the speaker and play the file so it can be heard by the group. A language group says that the sound quality is far better than the CD player they previously used. See Equipment Note 156A for more details.





As an alternative, we have two pairs of Logitech Z320 Compact Speakers, kept in the QMH. They plug into the headphone socket of a laptop or projector and, using a mains-powered stereo amplifier, can produce clear sound for a u3a discussion group. They are not suitable for Hi Fi music or for a dance group. They are described in Equipment Note 055/058.

Hi Fi music



For listening to music, we have a hi-fi TEAC CD player, kept in the QMH and two Marantz amplifiers – one in QMH and the other in the Church of the Ascension in Torrisholme. We also have two pairs of loudspeakers (shown overleaf) – one in each location. This set-up can be used to play music CDs. Regularly the CoA amplifier and a pair of speakers are used with a laptop and a digital projector to show videos. (The sound is not up to *The Dukes* theatre but is much better than the speakers you find in laptops or projectors.)



Acoustics 2020i speakers (QMH)



KEF QI3 speakers (CoA)

Talks with PowerPoint



We have several digital projectors - three in Lancaster QMH, one in Torrisholme Church of the Ascension (CoA) and another in Heysham Library. All can accept HDMI [1] connectors (see photo). This type of connector is standard on many computers, and a single HDMI cable can connect the computer and projector. We keep an HDMI cable in each projector bag.

Asset number	Make	Model	Resolution	Brightness lumen	Contrast ratio	Location
001	Acer	P1385W	1280 x 800	3400	20000:1	Heysham Library
019	Acer	P1350W	1280 x 800	3700	20000:1	CoA Morecambe
040	Optoma	EW531	1280 x 800	2600	3000:1	QMH cupboard 2
093	Acer	P1385W	1280 x 800	3400	20000:1	QMH cupboard 2
153	Acer	H6542BDI	1920 x 1080	5200	10000:1	QMH cupboard 2

The *Social Room* at the QMH and the Vestry Room at the CoA both have pull-down screens. We also have a 2 m wide tripod screen for large rooms, like the QMH Meeting Room, as well as smaller portable screens in QMH and Torrisholme Methodist Church.

The Optoma EW531 projector is really only suitable for small rooms with reasonable blackout. It is kept in reserve. Three of the Acer projectors (assets 001, 019 and 093) are interchangeable. Small differences in nominal brightness are swamped by the slow dimming of lamps over time. [Note: lamp life is 4000 hours at full power (more than twice that in power-saving mode). Used twice a week for 2 hours/session gives a life of 1000 weeks ≈ 20 years] Our latest projector (asset no 153) is fine for a big screen in a large room but can be overpowering in a small room.

People giving talks often bring their own laptop. However, we have three general-user laptops in QMH and one in Morecambe CoA. They use LibreOffice software which can read Microsoft PowerPoint files. (They use Windows 10 and cannot be regularly updated for cybersecurity. They are fine for showing PowerPoint files from a USB stick but should not be connected to the u3a website or to Beacon.)

If a PowerPoint file has embedded video with a soundtrack, the sound will be exported via the HDMI link. However, projector speakers are rarely more than 4 cm diameter and the sound is often a bit tinny.

[1] HDMI *High-Definition Multimedia Interface*

And they are not powerful enough to fill a large room. If the soundtrack is important, it is better to use a separate amplifier and speaker, which can either be plugged into the 3.5 mm headphone socket on the laptop[2] or into a similar socket on the projector. We have three options:

- ◊ A wheeled QR10PA public address amplifier as used by u3a dance groups in QMH and Morecambe (see below) – best for very large rooms or films with a drums & bass sound track.
- ◊ A Marantz PM6003 amplifier with twin loudspeakers (see pages 1 & 2) – best for films improved by a Hi-Fi stereo soundtrack.
- ◊ A pair of Logitech speakers (see page 1) – easiest to carry and operate.

Watching videos



If the video is on a laptop, then the set-up described above can be used. If it is on a DVD or Blu-ray disc, we have a Panasonic DMP-BD75 DVD player capable of feeding any of the projectors via a HDMI lead, and driving an amplifier via a twin phono cable.

The DVD player is an anonymous-looking black box, and has an easy-to-use controller (shown on the right).

Public lectures or dance groups



If a group is planning a public lecture in a large venue, the most appropriate equipment is probably one of our QR10PA portable amplifiers (photo on left). These have a 60W (RMS) 100W (peak) output, which is capable of addressing a room seating at least a hundred people. They also have internal batteries that, if fully charged, can run for several hours without mains power – good for any group thinking about an outdoor event.



The same amplifiers are used by several dance groups, with phono inputs for the music and a UHF wireless microphone for the caller. We have two Behringer ULM300LAV microphones (photo on right) that have a clip-on microphone, belt-clip transmitter, and receiver that plugs into the amplifier. They have a range of about 30 metres. (see Equipment Note 132/133C). For more traditional lectures, we can arrange wired microphones. Please get in touch.

[2] All u3a laptops have 3.5 mm jack sockets. Adapters are available for other laptops having USB-C sockets.

Assisted hearing

Many of the venues we use were designed for quite different purposes to a u3a group. Participating in a sung church service, a reverberant room acoustic makes singing more comfortable and provides *atmosphere* for the congregants, most of whom will be familiar with the words. At the other end of the spectrum, a Quaker meeting room needs a low-reverberation acoustic so spoken ministry is comprehensible by all, even those sitting behind the speaker. Much as we might like all venues to modify rooms to suit our activities, this is unlikely. We have to live with the rooms we can rent, in some of which members may find hearing difficult. I am happy to support group leaders who are trying to solve problems of this sort.

More information

The various groups in Lancaster & Morecambe u3a could probably think of many uses for audio-visual equipment. This note doesn't attempt to be all-embracing, but gives a snapshot of some possibilities. I have prepared more detailed guidance notes for the major items of equipment, which can be found here: **https://lancaster-morecambe.u3asite.uk/information-for-u3a-equipment/**

If you think equipment like this might be useful for your group but are not quite sure what would be best or how to connect it up, please get in touch.

Increasingly, groups are meeting in locations which have built-in projectors with drop-down screens (e.g. Torrisholme Methodist Church) or built-in video screens (e.g. St Thomas's Church or Lancaster Methodist Church). The types and quantities of equipment we need in L&M u3a changes from year to year. I should be pleased to receive feedback from groups about what they use, and what they would like to use, were it available.

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