



BEACON NEWS

Edition: 35

November 2023

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The purpose of this bi-monthly newsletter is to provide useful information to our Beacon Users.

Message from Beacon National Support Lead

Why do we publish Beacon News?

We publish Beacon News to keep our Beacon family up to date with what is happening with Beacon. We regularly make enhancements and updates to the Beacon programme and we want to make sure that you get the best experience when using Beacon.

As from Edition 36 of Beacon News, we will have a regular feature listing the latest releases for enhancements and bug fixes. Some of the more recent updates are providing Group Leaders with the ability to list members on group joining waiting lists in chronological order, to help select new members to be admitted to the group on a first come, first served basis. We have also made it possible for Site Administrators to email all users from the User list in Beacon. We are now finalising the specifications for phase one of the financial upgrades which gives Membership Secretaries a better view of finance.

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Message from Beacon National Support Lead (continued)

We have made other changes to Beacon which affect administrators' ability to search the Audit log. This change affects the audit log search range period, which has now been reduced to a three-month window. This has been done because a search of the audit log locks the database to other users until the search is complete. When searching over a several year period this can take many minutes and if the search is repeated several times this could end up with a denial of service to other users for a considerable period of time.

Our Beacon team have been busy this month with Training programmes, Specification writing for upgrades, User Guide and Video updates, maintaining the Beacon Website and manning the Beacon Helpdesk to make sure that someone is available to help you when things go wrong.

On your behalf I would like to thank them for their hard work and dedication to making sure that your Beacon experience is an enjoyable one.

Thank you.

Frank Bailey



FURTHER INFORMATION

Beacon Software Testing

The Beacon Software testing team is responsible for user acceptance testing all releases prepared by our developers, Siftware, before they are deployed to the live system. This includes new developments which have been specified by the Enhancement Team and fixes for problems which have been discovered by the Beacon community and prioritised for resolution.

Testing is carried out by a small team of Beacon Supporters who have a wide range of experience in using Beacon, so are able to review the impact that a proposed change may have across the full Beacon system. Recent tests have covered the member portal log-in enhancements, the bulk sending of membership cards to members on renewal, enhancements to the email formatting and various minor bugs and enhancements.

Gary Nye

User Acceptance Team

Beacon Emails (From Users' Forum)

A number of u3a group members recently had their email accounts hacked, as some Group Leaders had previously sent emails as Cc (Carbon copy) using a different system from Beacon. This meant that all group members email details were visible to those who received the email.

This resulted in the hackers having access to all the email addresses for further exploitation.

One key benefit of sending emails using Beacon is that the system ensures they are sent Bcc (Blind carbon copy), which is recommended to all Group Leaders, to stop this situation occurring.

Beacon Enhancements

The Beacon Enhancement team, work with Siftware who are a small company specialising in Beacon's technology.

Siftware are involved with the maintenance and support of the Beacon System but they are also responsible for doing enhancements.

Some of the enhancements are trivial but some are much more extensive. The enhancements come from both the Beacon users via the forum, direct questions to the Help desk and also amendments that are initiated by the Trust to help keep us legal such as Gift Aid.

The Enhancement team review all the requests coming in and determine whether the requests are cost justified. We consider factors such as impact, implications, workarounds and likely complexity and hence cost. All requests submitted are reviewed and considered by the Enhancement team.

Once it has been determined that the change will be done then the enhancement team will write a specification which will go to Siftware. Siftware will then make the change, review and test it internally and then pass it back to the Beacon testing team to user test. Once the Enhancement team are happy with the change and the relevant Beacon documentation has been updated then Siftware will release it. This is done on the first Tuesday of the Month at 10:30.

Changes that have been done recently include changes to the Tokens on emails, the ability to make selected polls updateable by members through the portal and change of the default payment method to BACS.

The Enhancement team meet once a fortnight via Microsoft Teams.

Marion Sharp

Beacon Enhancement Team

Beacon Communications

May I remind every Site Administrator (Site Admin) that they are our main contact with their u3a. This is the person who has a username **admin** on Beacon. We ask that all communications we send you are circulated to at least your committee and often to all users. To help, we recently put in place the ability to tick against users in the list and email them.

It is also very important that you tell us if the Site Admin changes or their email address changes. There is a procedure in the User Guide which details what should be done, see details and watch video below.

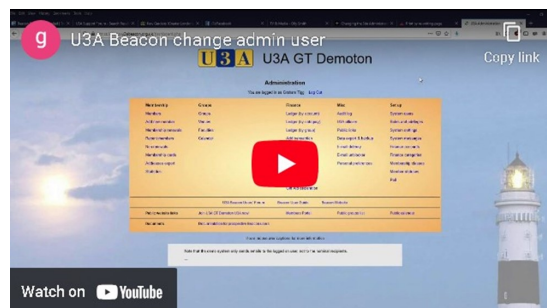
Please note:

The video is opened in a new browser tab and by clicking on the video will take you to YouTube.

Changing Site Administrator details

Important – so that your u3a receives critical service notifications, after changing the Site Administrator it is **imperative the Beacon Team are notified with contact details** (last step below).

To change Site Administrator, the new Site Administrator should ask the former Site Administrator for the login ID (which should be **admin**) and the password.



I should add that many of you inform us correctly, but we still discover odd sites where things have changed but we are not told.

Thanks for your assistance.

John Alexander

Documentation and Training Lead

Beacon Training Feedback

As a result of various training, we thought it might be helpful to address some points raised in training sessions.

User Guide

Complementing the Beacon software is the Beacon User Guide, which is a crucial means of cascading Beacon knowledge and understanding to u3as. This is constantly being enhanced, not only to reflect the latest changes to Beacon, but also to provide greater clarity about particular features.

We are aware that whilst some users are acquainted with the particular aspect of Beacon that directly concerns them, many users are not fully aware of:

- The impact of Beacon's Set up parameters and the integration between Membership, Groups and Finance modules.
- The availability of the Data Export and Backup options and the information that can only be found from these downloads.
- The existence and scope of the User Guide and how to access it.
- The Help Widget.

May we suggest that System Administrators reading this article keep up to date with the Beacon Enhancement Notifications and make your System Users aware of the User Guide and the Help Widget.

The [Beacon User Guide](#) link at the foot of the Beacon Administration page

[U3A Beacon Users' Forum](#)

[Beacon User Guide](#)

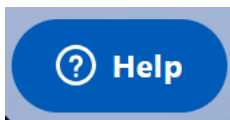
[Beacon Website](#)

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Beacon Training Feedback (continued)

- The Help Centre
- Where you can find advice on the [Best Ways to use the User Guide](#)
- The [User Guide](#) itself
- We will soon be implementing a better notification of enhancements.
- The Help Widget



This is present on all Beacon pages including when you sign in.

Clicking on it lets the user type a short description of subject for which help is required.

Martin Sutton

Member of Documentation and Training Team

Beacon Sites

With Beacon's increasing popularity, as the preferred membership management system for u3as, we are pleased to announce that the total number of 'live' sites now used by u3as has risen to **571**, with a further **13** sites used by Networks/Regions.

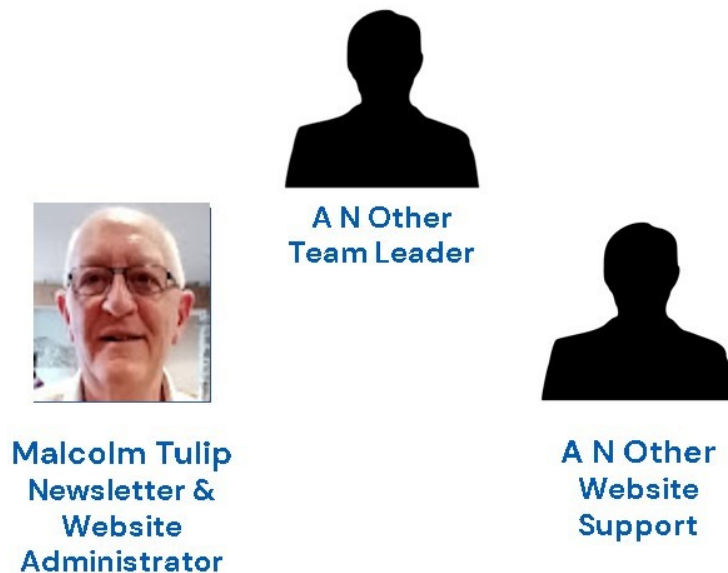


COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Who we are and what we do

Name	Role
A N Other	Team Leader
Malcolm Tulip	Newsletter & Website Administrator
A N Other	Website Support

Beacon Communications Team



BEACON WEBSITE

Beacon is an on line management system designed by u3as, for u3as. It provides a simple interface for managing members, groups and finances. Beacon is available to all u3as in the UK that wish to take advantage of it. More information about Beacon can be found through the link to the website.

The members of the editorial team are as follows:

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