



Edition: 43

March 2025

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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

March and it is the second Beacon News of the year. We have currently put a pause on Beacon upgrades and concentrated on the small niggly things that detract from the overall Beacon enjoyment. We will continue our Beacon upgrade programme in May.

Meanwhile, I would like to ask all Beacon News readers to spread the word to Beacon users, be it as an Officer/Group leader or as a member, that the best way to get help when doing something new on Beacon is by accessing the User Guide. Access to this can be found through the BLUE button at the bottom lefthand corner of any of the Beacon screens.



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Message from Beacon National Support Lead (continued)

If you still need further support with a particular problem, please feel free to contact the Helpdesk. Instructions for how to do this are contained in the User Guide – search for ‘support’.

As a Team we are keen to make sure that our users have all the support that they need to access and use Beacon easily and successfully.

To help you and your friends move forward with Beacon we have designed and are delivering Training Courses to give you the knowledge and support you need to improve your Beacon journey.

Please pass this information on to the Officers and Members of your u3a to help them with their Beacon journey, whether it be User access to manage Groups, Members and Finance, or it be a regular Member access through the Members Portal to check Calendars or Renew Membership. It is important that we spread the knowledge to help others use Beacon better.

Please enjoy your read through our Beacon News.

Frank Bailey



Beacon Enhancements

The Beacon Enhancement Team is a group of volunteers who meet bi-weekly to review any enhancement requests. These will have been put forward by u3as through the Helpdesk, or where there has been a thread on the Users' Forum which merits a review to see if a change in a particular area would be helpful.

Each request is logged and discussed to see whether it would benefit all u3as who use the system. Sometimes there are very specific requests which would not be useful to others. Our aim is always not to over complicate and to keep Beacon as a straightforward tool for u3as to use.

Once a change has been agreed then someone on the Enhancement Team will draft a specification for Siftware. The specification is reviewed by the team and when agreed it is passed to Siftware for development.

On completing the development Siftware pass the change back to the Enhancement Team to be user tested.

Sometimes a change will require an amendment to the User Guide and this is done in parallel with the testing so that when the change goes live the documentation is also up to date.

Some recent changes have included, the change to the Officers List edit capability to include - Notify when a member joins on line. There have also been a number of recent finance changes.

Marion Sharp

Enhancement Team Lead

FURTHER INFORMATION

Beacon Hints and Tips

1. We all just set up a password to access computer-based systems. It is good practice to periodically change your passwords in Beacon. There are many ideas and suggestions on how to create a password, I leave you to look on the internet.
2. POLLS, some u3as have set up a POLL to identify those who consent to collection of Gift Aid. Beacon has a facility called Gift Aid Log which records and keeps the key information. This is updated automatically when someone joins, leaves, or renews their membership. This saves problems of manually maintaining a POLL as there is no automatic link when people join / renew. Guidance on claiming Gift Aid is on the Trust's website under Advice and Guidance and Finance Matters.
3. Some u3as have different Membership fees for people who join the u3a towards the end of the membership year; e.g. a membership class of "Part Year". This works but has the difficulty that when that person renews their membership it is essential for the Membership Secretary to change their class of membership. This is necessary to make sure they pay the correct fee. Beacon has a facility to handle this:

In System Settings you can set the Annual fee to vary by month of joining. As shown below:

Membership card colour	EAFFB0 Click in box to select colour
E-mail membership cards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> for on-line applications and renewals
Public enquiry: Telephone	
Public enquiry: E-mail	
u3a Home Page	
On-line new member enquiries	admin@beacon.u3a.org.uk
On-line renewal enquiries	admin@beacon.u3a.org.uk
Membership fees	Annual - fees vary by month of joining

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Beacon Hints and Tips (continued)

Then in each membership class you set the fees for each month as illustrated below:

Membership Class Record

6417	Class Name <input type="text" value="Individual"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current
Explanation for on-line services		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 of 2 people at same address (HMRC Family membership) <input type="checkbox"/> Full member of another u3a <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Show to members joining on-line		
Notes <input type="text"/>		
<input type="button" value="Save Record"/> This record is locked against deletion		

Membership Fees per person for this class (£)

Renewal	New members	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	9.00	9.00	9.00

Auto-propagate: changes will be copied to months to right
All fields must be completed
Note that these are always fees per person, even for Joint memberships

Now a new member is just put into the Individual Membership Class and the system expects a payment of £9.00 if they join in July, August or September.

When they subsequently renew, they will be expected to pay the full £18.00. Your Membership Secretary just renews the members as normal and does not need to remember to change their class.

4. Another common approach for new members is to not charge if they join in the last months of the membership year. Again, there is a setting in Beacon to do this automatically. In System Settings under Membership Fees is this box:

Membership fees	Annual - fees vary by month of joining
Extended membership	Include following year if joining from <input type="button" value="September"/>

In this example a person joining in September is asked to pay the full annual fee for membership starting in October with their membership valid until October of the following year.

As ever more information is in the User Guide: [Beacon User Guide](#)

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Beacon Hints and Tips (continued)

I stress that these are not recommendations but just tips and how Beacon can be configured to handle these situations more efficiently.

John Alexander

Training and Documentation Lead

Beacon User Statistics

As of the 6th March 2025, the number of live sites and their members, are shown below.

u3as / Networks / Regions	Number
u3as using Beacon	634
Members in these u3as	303,999
Networks / Regions using Beacon	18
Members in these Networks / Regions	5,193
u3as preparing to migrate to Beacon	3
u3as using Demo24 (Demonstration site) to investigate joining Beacon	53

John Alexander

Training and Documentation Lead

John Hopkins

Support and Migration Lead

Beacon – Windows 10

There has been some discussion on Facebook, the Beacon Users' Forum and questions into the Beacon HelpDesk regarding the impact to Beacon of Windows 10 Home and Professional going End of Support (EoS) on 14th October this year.

Beacon does not run on a Windows platform and has its own extensive data and system protection so will not become any more vulnerable to attack when Windows 10 on user devices goes End of Support (EoS). Any increased risks in using devices running Windows 10 after EoS will be with the device, its user and/or its data, which could include data that has been downloaded from Beacon, when working online.

When Windows 10 goes EoS, Microsoft will cease all support including the release of security updates so vulnerability to security attacks on Desktop and Laptop computers may increase. Importantly, if a Desktop/Laptop computer uses Windows Defender for Antivirus and Internet protection, updates to this will cease so it is important to install a good Antivirus programme. Windows 10 is also the Operating system on early versions of Microsoft devices such as "Surface Pro", "Surface Laptop" and "Surface Go" so Windows 10 EoS will similarly affect these devices.

It is likely, over time, with Windows 10 not receiving updates, that Apps and programmes running on Windows 10 devices will also cease to receive updates due to them not being compatible with the down-level Operating System. Such Apps and programmes include web browsers which update regularly so over time, browsers may cease to work correctly or at all, with online services such as shopping sites, banking sites and possibly Beacon.

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Beacon – Windows 10 (continued)

Microsoft has announced a Extended Security Updates (ESU) programme for Windows 10 <https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/whats-new/extended-security-updates> and will extend the current level of support - essentially Microsoft will continue to ship security updates for 12 months beyond the EoS date and until 13th October 2026. At the time of writing, Microsoft had not provided details of the cost but it is likely to be a one-off cost of approximately \$30/£24 per device.

Roy Biggs

Ongoing Help (HelpDesk) Lead.



COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Who we are and what we do

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

Beacon Communications Team



Malcolm Tulip
Team Leader



A N Other
Newsletter &
Website
Administrator



Graham Tigg
Website
Support

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:

Editor: Malcolm Tulip

Email: malcolm.tulip@beacon.u3a.org.uk

Proof Reader: Graham Tigg