



**BEACON NEWS**

Edition: 25

November 2021

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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**

Beacon goes from strength to strength. We are now quickly approaching 500 u3as on Beacon and in addition to that, our network package is in pilot and will be ready for rollout in the near future.

We have had the first of our supporter events. These events have been arranged to give Beacon supporters the latest information on where Beacon is and how we envisage moving forward. We have identified that users training is a very big part of the Beacon team delivery commitment.

We continue to receive requests for perceived bug fixes and enhancements via the Forum and by other routes. Our latest request is to remove "Autofill" of fields on forms from Beacon. Doing this would instruct your browser not to try and complete fields, such as an address, with previously entered data. Some of us have accidentally auto filled a member record with another member's details.

We will be looking into this, however we need to bear in mind that some users use this feature and would be sorry to lose it. Until a decision has been made on the auto fill feature, users accessing Beacon through an iPad or other touch screen devices please double check you entry before saving or moving to the next screen, as the original entry cannot be recovered from the Audit log.

As a Team, we are happy to receive requests that lead to improving Beacon, please continue to send them in.

**Frank Bailey**

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### **Demoton refreshed to Demotown – from Graham Tigg & John Hopkins**

The original Demoton was a blend of “Demo” and “town” and was the term we had adopted for Beacon demonstration sites. The new Demotown site is intended for prospective u3as to try out Beacon and for live u3as to explore features and train their System Users.

In the early days of Beacon there was a single shared demo site that we could all login to and yes, it was anarchy. A few years ago individual Demotons dedicated to a single u3a were introduced. They were pre-populated with fictitious but realistic member records, groups and finance transactions. A downside of being realistic meant, over time, that operations such as renewals, finance reports and group members who needed to renew being shown in red, have started to become unworkable.

A refreshed Demotown is now available and is being deployed for all new Demo sites. It has up to date data with the number of members reduced to 55 from 258 to make it easier to get started. More than two dozen sites have been made available to prospective and requesting u3as since the summer. If your u3a would like a refreshed Demo system then request one here [Open a Support Ticket](#).

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### **Beacon for Networks and Regions**

The North West Region of u3as have gone live with their Beacon system. John Alexander provided support to the region and is training members of the regional team. The North West of England Regional Trustee, Neil Stevenson, said “Beacon will help the region to improve our communications with u3as and Networks in the region. It will also help us to manage our events more easily”. Neil gave a talk and demonstration of the region’s Beacon system to 160 attendees at the Network Link meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> October. He talked about the benefits to Networks of using Beacon.

Representatives of more than 10 Networks have now been in touch to express their interest in adopting Beacon and have been placed on the waiting list. We are awaiting the final version of Terms and Conditions to be approved by the Trust. This principally clarifies that there will be no charge for the limited use Networks will make of the system.

## The u3a Support Forum – from Alan Swindale

The u3a Support Forum was started just after Beacon launched and was the Beacon Support Forum until the Covid lockdowns whereupon its remit was widened to the whole u3a movement. The majority of its content is still Beacon related. It is intended that any user of the Forum can post a query or a point of interest and then any reader can post a reply. Different users of the Forum often have different approaches to how they run their u3as and how they use Beacon so the original post can initiate a thread of conversation with different solutions to the same problem.

Anyone can register to join the Forum; just go to <https://forum.u3abeacon.org.uk>, click on the 'Register' link in the black menu bar and then provide a few simple details. This enables the registered user to browse the Forum but not to post new items or replies. There is a search facility, but it is a simple text search without the 'intelligence' we have become used to in Google and the like. The Forum is organized into sub-forums each devoted to a particular topic and inside each sub-forum there are many individual conversation threads.

Within a short time, usually 24 hours or less, the account will be activated by the Forum moderator and the user can post new items or replies.

Many new users do not realise that at the top of every sub-forum's page there is a black button titled 'Post Thread'. Click this button to start a new thread in that sub-forum. Please give it a meaningful title to help other users, write your post and then click on the 'Post Thread' button below the text box. You can subsequently edit your post or even delete it.

The user can set up their account to be automatically notified of new posts/ replies in sub-forums or threads where they have an interest.

The Forum is moderated against profanity or in case conflicting opinions become too vigorous but this has not been necessary over the past years while I have been Moderator. u3a members are on the whole helpful and considerate.

A digest of the past week's posts is sent to Beacon Supporters and Beacon Administrators. Others may request to be added to the circulation of the digest by emailing [forum@beacon.u3a.org.uk](mailto:forum@beacon.u3a.org.uk). Please note that this address is for matters concerning the operation of the Forum not as an alternative to posting on the Forum!

## **Beacon Training – from John Alexander**

The Training Team are working hard to provide some new assistance to users of Beacon. Currently we are working on short videos showing how you carry out specific tasks such as; the Membership renewal process or End of Financial Year. These, when complete, will be in the User Guide at the appropriate place. This is meant to supplement the extensive written guide so you have at least two ways to get assistance on key tasks. As you might expect there is a lot of work to create good quality training.

This article is to ask you, the users, if there are specific things that we might usefully cover which you would find helpful.

If you have an idea then please contact: [info@beacon.u3a.org.uk](mailto:info@beacon.u3a.org.uk)

## **Help us to help you!**

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### **COMMUNICATIONS TEAM**

#### **Who we are and what we do**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>Neil Stevenson</b>	<b>Team Leader</b>
<b>Tony Darbyshire</b>	<b>Webmaster</b>
<b>Malcolm Tulip</b>	<b>Newsletter Editor &amp; Assistant Webmaster</b>

### **BEACON WEBSITE**

Beacon is a 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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