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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 continues to develop and the next enhancements due out soon includes an upgrade to the email capabilities.

The email system will include an improved editor with spellcheck and an improved token selection system for the delivery of personalized emails.

More details will be published by the team soon, so please keep your eyes open for it.

With the number of u3as using Beacon now exceeding 550 we feel it is now time to ask if there is anyone out there who would like to join the Beacon Team and become a supporter.

The support role can be very satisfying in helping others to understand and develop new ways of working.

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## Message from Beacon National Support Lead (continued)

The work entails discussing the Beacon opportunities with a u3a directing and supporting them in the preparation of their data so that we can migrate it into Beacon. Once live on Beacon it is necessary to provide training and direction to system users.

If you feel that you would like to give this a try please contact the Beacon team on:- [info@beacon.u3a.org.uk](mailto:info@beacon.u3a.org.uk)

Frank Bailey



Keeping u3a  
Connected

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### Beacon Enhancements

Responsibility for the Beacon application and hosting platform management lies with Siftware, a small company specialising in Beacon's technology. The jargon here is PHP, MySQL, WebServer etc.

Maintenance and incident investigation will always be Siftware's priority, but the majority of their time is spent developing enhancements. These range from the relatively trivial, such as some bug fixes and improved wording, through to complex releases such as the recent simplification of the member's portal login.

One of the biggest challenges is that while Siftware have software development expertise they are not users and they are not Beacon 'users'. This implies changes to functionality cannot make the assumptions about the details that we would make. The clearer a specification the less reworking after testing is required.

One question that frequently crops up is how do we prioritise Beacon changes? The obvious priorities are urgent fixes that don't have an easy work-around. These are relatively rare, perhaps one a month or so, but tend to arrive like London buses. There are also changes required by the Trust – Gift Aid and security being two areas recently addressed.

Beyond that, we look at what users are reporting on the Help Desk, at Training sessions, on the Forum or from emails. There is also our pipeline of potential changes to regularly review.

To these inputs we seek to create a mix of change complexity balanced over time across a spread of Beacon functional areas – membership, portal, administration, email, groups, finance etc.

Not all changes are obvious to users. One that will be is enhancements to the email composition experience – more #TOKENS, spell checking and the ability to paste images into emails.

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## Beacon Enhancements (continued)

### Digital Strategy

With low-key publicity to date the Trust's Digital Strategy has been published and can be found on [u3a.org.uk](https://www.u3a.org.uk).

Login first and then visit <https://www.u3a.org.uk/trust-and-trustee-updates>. Scroll down to see the .pdf download links below the Video.

As the full strategy document is 18 pages long, a shorter, three page, Digital Strategy Summary Document has also been created, see screenshot below.

 u3a Digital Strategy (311.76 KB)

 Digital Strategy Summary Document (113.26 KB)

From a Beacon perspective two 'tactics' have been identified.

1. Investigate feasibility and scope of integrating membership management system (Beacon) and website platform (SiteWorks).
2. Establish a long-term roadmap for our membership management and website tools based on the needs of members.

With reference to Tactic 1: **SiteWorks Integration**

There needs to be a requirements gathering exercise, but as a first step a small technical group will be meeting to set the boundaries of what is technically realistic. For example, any form of two-way data synchronisation between the two systems would be too complex to develop and support.

**Graham Tigg**

Beacon Migration and Enhancements

## Beacon Documentation and Training

As we near the end of this batch of Beacon Training we organised a Question and Answer session on a recent Thursday. Apologies to those who had difficulty in getting in. Despite some failures we had a good number and they were able to get answers to a range of questions.

Recognising the difficulties and frustrations we are hoping to have another session in early July.

The training will restart in September and we are organising some dates which will be sent to all Site Admins.

We keep updating the User Guide so that it matches the current software. Occasionally a user will notice an area which they suggest can be improved. We review their comment and mostly implement it. Thanks for the suggestions.

One of our team recently did a presentation to the Network Link covering Beacon and how it can benefit Networks. If your network would welcome more information then please get in touch. I would stress that only Affiliated Networks can have Beacon.

**John Alexander**

Documentation and Training Lead

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### Editor's note:

Extract below from: [u3a Networks](#)

If a Network wishes to use the u3a logo or apply for funding, they do have to sign a Network Affiliation Agreement (NAA) with the Trust. A copy is available from the chair of Network Link and a signed copy needs to be sent to the CEO for signature and retention.

# COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

## Who we are and what we do

| Name           | Role                            |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Neil Stevenson | Team Leader                     |
| A N Other      | Website Administrator           |
| Malcolm Tulip  | Newsletter &<br>Website Support |

## Beacon Communications Team



Neil Stevenson  
Team Leader



Malcolm Tulip  
Newsletter &  
Website Support



A N Other  
Website  
Administrator

## 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:

**Editor:** Malcolm Tulip

Email: [malcolm.tulip@beacon.u3a.org.uk](mailto:malcolm.tulip@beacon.u3a.org.uk)

**Proof Reader:** Graham Tigg