u3a Beacon

BEACON *NEWS*

Edition: 34

September 2023

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

Message from Beacon National Support Lead

Since our last Newsletter there has been an upgrade to the Beacon email system. The main upgrade changes are to provide clickable mail merge tokens for use when sending a group of personalised emails. This makes it easier to compose messages. We have also introduced the ability to use spellcheck. This takes advantage of your browser spellcheck function. Please ensure that your browser spellcheck is turned on and that you have selected English UK for this to work properly.

Unfortunately, because of the way the email system works, images pasted into a message are not saved when the message is saved as a standard message.

Our next improvement to the email system is to remove the email composition page Time Out issue and to add an email select tick box to the Beacon listing of System users so that Administrators can contact all Users easily.

Other work that has been completed and fully deployed is the implementation of the recommendations from the independent penetration test carried out at the end of last year. The reason for the test is to check the system for its ability to protect the data held from Hackers. The Pen test only showed up low grade issues and these have now been addressed.

Beacon usage continues to grow with over 560 u3as now using it. The Trust have commissioned a report to advise on how best to move forward with the integration of Beacon and SiteWorks – the new SiteBuilder replacement.

I hope to be able to inform you of the recommendations as soon as they are available.

Frank Bailey

FURTHER INFORMATION

Beacon Training

As you will know, we have arranged some training sessions during September for those u3as who are new to Beacon this year, and in October and November for all u3as.

The two of us that process applications have been extremely busy and as a result – at the time of writing this – some of the sessions are already full after only 48 hours. The response has shown that there is still a huge demand for these sessions and if you didn't manage to obtain one this time we will be arranging more for the New Year.

The Beacon Administrator for u3as is the only point of contact we have, so if you are an Administrator can we ask that you forward the emails concerning training to the relevant people in your u3a. We also ask that you share with relevant people in your u3a other information that we send including Beacon News and details of Enhancements such as the recent email changes.

It would seem that many u3a members do not even know who their Beacon Administrator is. Please can Committees ensure that Administrators are made known to their membership especially those who are new to the Committee, Group Leaders, etc. who may need/want some training. It is hoped that the Beacon Administrator is willing to give initial training to new users, and our courses are to build on this basic knowledge, not to replace it.

After the article in the last Beacon News, we have been successful in recruiting three more Supporters. Thank you to those who came forward. We can always use more.

Beacon Training (continued)

We especially need someone who can join the Beacon Team as a member of our Communications Team.

So, if you have experience or an interest in Marketing, Publicity, Website Administration or Communications in general, please do consider contacting us at admin@beacon.u3a.co.uk giving your contact details and what experience you have.

We hope to hear from you.

Marian Luck

Beacon Team Admin, Networks and Recruitment

Beacon Publicity and Website

The Publicity and Website team has two members. Malcolm Tulip looks after this newsletter and the Beacon website. I prepare publicity material and liaise with the u3a office communications team to promote Beacon. So, we are a small, but beautifully formed team.

We aim to produce a newsletter every other month, so six times per year. We have a schedule for creating articles from each of the Beacon teams. Malcolm recently took over the website following the retirement of Tony Darbyshire. As with all websites, they need a refresh now and again. Malcolm is looking at what we would like to change and improve. If you have any website skills and are interested in helping, please do get in touch.

Benefits of Beacon – Testimonials are welcome!

Eighteen months ago, we were celebrating our 500th u3a using Beacon. Today that has risen to over 560 u3as supporting more than a quarter of a million members. This is a wonderful achievement of which we should be proud. However, we estimate that around 400 of our u3as have yet to implement a comprehensive membership and management system. Many will still be using spreadsheets. We are working to produce a new leaflet to help those u3as to understand the benefits of Beacon. If you have any good news stories about how Beacon has helped our u3as, please do let me know.

Neil Stevenson
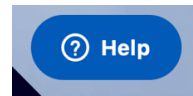
Communications Team Leader

Beacon User Guide

I thought that given the number of Enhancements recently implemented it might be helpful to remind you about the **User Guide**.

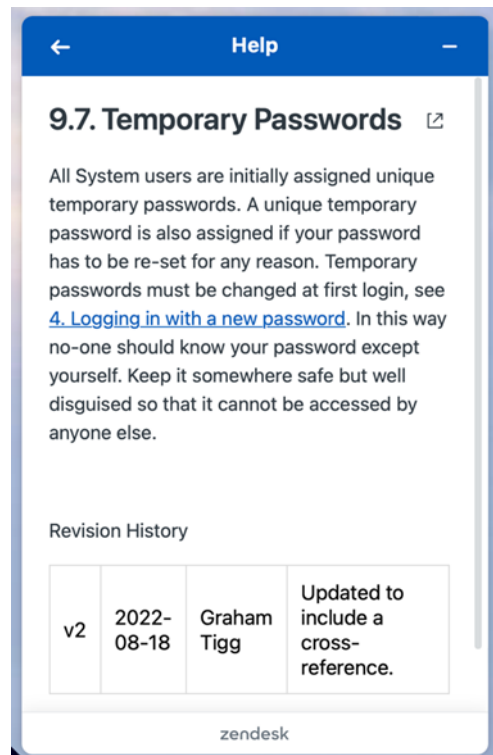There are two obvious methods to use the guide:

Access Method 1

In the bottom left of each page is this icon;

Press it and it opens a box and you type in your area of interest and press **Enter** on your keyboard. It will also give you a selection of articles that might be of relevance.

Click on the one that suits. In this case I have Temporary Passwords.

If you click on this icon ⬀ (positioned upper right after Passwords)

This will make the image Full Screen. As the User Guide is a separate site this will still mean that you have your Beacon site open.

Beacon User Guide (continued)

With over 130 articles in the guide, you can find answers to many questions.

When on full screen you can print an article. One note of caution, we frequently update the guide to accommodate any changes to the software.

At the foot of most articles, you will find a revision history so if in doubt about the match between article and software please check this.

We do our best to ensure that the guide is updated in advance of the release of any software change.

Access Method 2

On the main Beacon page once you log in, in the centre towards the bottom is **Beacon User Guide.** Select this and it opens the main page. Here you will see a list and can view all articles and there is a good Search facility.

Membership	U3a Groups	Finance	Misc	Set up
Members	U3a Groups	Ledger (by account)	Audit log	System users
Add new member	Venues	Ledger (by category)	u3a Officers	Roles and privileges
Membership renewals	Faculties	Ledger (by group)	Public links	System settings
Recent members	Calendar	Add transaction	Data export & backup	System messages
Non-renewals		Transfer money	E-mail delivery	Finance accounts
Membership cards		Credit batches	E-mail unblocker	Finance categories
Addresses export		Reconcile account	Personal preferences	Membership classes
Statistics		Financial statement		Member statuses
		Groups statement		Poll

U3A Beacon Users' Forum   Beacon User Guide   Beacon Website

Videos

We have added a few videos to cover some areas. We are going to do more and also please note the Membership one will be updated.

John Alexander

Documentation and Training Lead

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Who we are and what we do

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

Beacon Communications Team

Neil Stevenson
Team Leader

Malcolm Tulip
Newsletter &
Website
Administrator

A N Other
Website
Support

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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