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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

I would like to begin the New Beacon Year by wishing you a 'Happy New Year'.

Beacon continues to provide a strong reliable platform for managing your u3a, currently there are more than 575 u3as using the system.

We are constantly looking for ways of improving Beacon. The current high-profile improvements being worked on in finances are the ability:

- 1) To give refunds within financial transactions without affecting income and expenditure.
- 2) To enable the year end rollover of group balances.
- 3) To provide improved budgeting and reporting.

The first two of these should be available in the early part of this year.

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Message from Beacon National Support Lead (continued)

Please note we will shortly be removing the male/female checkbox on the Beacon new member form. This information has no bearing on a membership and in its current form also excludes people who do not identify as either gender. Under GDPR we need to ensure that only data which is used for a clear purpose is collected. Consequently, the Trust has advised us to no longer include this option. I do hope this is not a problem to your u3a.

Going forward I wish you health and happiness as the year unfolds.

Frank Bailey



Keeping u3a
Connected

FURTHER INFORMATION

Beacon Journey Team of Supporters

So you've heard about Beacon and you want to know more?

Whether your journey starts from publicity in the Trust's website or you hear about it from another u3a, your request eventually comes to

info@beacon.u3a.org.uk. This is the starting point of your investigation with your own local copy of Demo22 which, except for restricted email, is your own fully functioning copy of Beacon to learn on.

We also provide one of our supporters to work with you. The supporters provide individual support as you investigate Beacon. They are there on email, phone, Zoom or even live meetings to provide answers to any questions you may have. All of our supporters have had many years of experience of Beacon in their own u3as.

We are lucky enough to have had some new members join us recently as older members retire or are called to take over local roles.

We can support u3as at any point. There are still new u3as being formed, often with less than twenty members. They have heard about Beacon and want to start off using it.

Numbers do not matter to Beacon and we have recently made two u3as live with 800+ and 1300+ members. We often get asked for a new Demo22 by older u3as who either never had one or have a very old copy.

Mergers, where two u3as become one, are rare and we are currently only working on our second. There are many issues about groups joining together, use of facilities, membership classes but especially finance that we can help with. There is a version of Beacon that we can provide for Networks and Regions.

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Beacon Journey Team of Supporters (continued)

The one area we have not been involved in yet, possibly due to Covid and numbers dropping, is a split of u3as but I'm sure the team could manage that one as well.

John Hopkins

Journey Lead

Beacon Help Desk

In June this year, the u3a Beacon HelpDesk will begin its 6th year and to date has received over 3,800 requests for help. Initially, the submission rate for tickets averaged 12 a week but over time it has increased to its present average rate of 21 tickets a week.

A large percentage of the problems reported are for e-mail. This is hardly surprising given that collectively across the UK, u3as send approximately 20 million e-mails a year. Beacon does not have its own e-mailing capability so uses SendGrid to despatch all e-mails. This, whilst being a mass e-mailing service, provides several advantages for u3as. The first is that Beacon protects member privacy because it cannot Carbon Copy (CC) e-mails. This is partly because SendGrid does not support CC but also because Beacon does not have a Contacts/Address book.

Instead, Beacon has to create each e-mail individually and send it to SendGrid to despatch to the member as a single e-mail.

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Beacon Help Desk (continued)

The second advantage is that apart from not having a Contacts/Address book, Beacon/SendGrid does not have a receive capability so is not at risk of receiving Spam/Scam e-mails that contain malicious attachments or links to malicious websites so in turn, cannot create Spam/Scam e-mail. Finally, Beacon provides the E-mail delivery log with information and status for every e-mail processed. This includes the date and time the e-mail was sent, by whom it was sent, the e-mail's subject and the date and time it was accepted by the member's e-mail server. When things go wrong, the log also provides details of the failure and its cause. These messages may appear gobbledygook but are brief so worth an attempt to understand because they often describe, in plain English, the problem.

An issue we often see and sometimes in bursts, are "dial tcp" and "Broken pipe" errors with SendGrid's server IP address followed by the member's e-mail server's IP address. These errors are more likely to occur with private e-mail and legacy e-mail accounts and it is not uncommon for them to appear suddenly, last a few days or weeks but then disappear, equally as sudden and for no apparent reason. Usually, whilst the issue remains, SendGrid will continue trying to send the e-mail so that the problem is resolved, the e-mails are delivered but delayed. Whilst these problems are with the member's e-mail service, the HelpDesk will always help in identifying the cause but neither Beacon nor SendGrid can resolve it so the advice given is always likely to be that the member should contact their e-mail service provider. The 'Desk' also receives large numbers of tickets for web-browser issues but this will have to wait until the next update from the Ongoing Help Team.

Roy Biggs

Technical Liaison and Ongoing Help Lead

Beacon Training

In December we held a Question-and-Answer session. With over 100 people reserving places we were disappointed that only 60 logged into the Zoom.

Thanks for those who sent apologies and to those who came.

Please note: that the E-mail delivery log may not be available to all your Beacon system users.

This lack of apologies seems to be the case for most of our training so this is a request for those who cannot come to please let us know.

So far feedback has been positive with some helpful suggestions on improving things. Thanks for those.

A few things came out of the discussions:

It is common to want to send emails to the whole committee using Beacon. The easy way is to create a POLL for the committee and then just select the POLL and email them. A second option is to add the committee to u3a Officers and use this to send emails to the committee.

A few ideas of how to handle finance for travel groups were passed around. One that might be worth considering is:

Create an interest Group in Beacon. Set Max members to '1' and make the Group Leader that member.

As people book for the trip you put them in but as the maximum number of members is already in the group, they will join the Waiting list.

When they pay assuming that the payment is to the main ledger account it needs to be entered into Beacon. You put the money into the Group Ledger with the members name and move to Member of Group.

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Beacon Training (continued)

Once all money is received you can then do an entry into the Group Ledger for a single payment to the Current account.

In the Beacon Current account you can enter each person as a receipt with their name. You can put these into a Batch to match the money received for the Group Ledger.

Remembering your settings

If you go to the bottom left of the Beacon screen and click on the black triangle you open Cookie Control. If you Accept these then the system remembers for 90 days the following:

- The name of your u3a for login
- The timeout period of activity after which you will be logged out
- How Forenames and Surnames appear and are sorted on Drop-down lists
- The last membership class selected for exporting addresses and labels
- Settings used when labels were last printed (labels per sheet and positioning)
- The Membership Status and Class used for Third Age Matters submission
- When composing an email the selected "From" address and "Tick to receive a copy" selection

Finance

It is not widely known that the Training Team now offer a mentoring service for treasurers who are implementing finance in Beacon. This especially applies to sites where you have been using Beacon for some time and now want to set up the finance.

Beacon Training (continued)

We have been working with some sites to see how it goes and whilst we have very limited resource we would like to now offer this more widely.

I must stress that this is principally an email help with us also being able to access your site to give specific guidance and possible Zoom sessions.

If you would like to get this help, please send an email to admin@beacon.u3a.org.uk. Giving your name, u3a and contact details.

Emails

To start there is a host of detailed guidance in the User Guide

Please consider using Tokens, not only do you make it nicer to receive a personal email but also you help reduce the chance of your email being seen as Spam and possibly not getting to your recipient.

All emails in Beacon go BCC (Blind Carbon Copy). That means each recipient will not know the other recipients of the email and cannot reply to all.

Recently the Information Commissioner stated that not sending emails BCC was a major contributor to breaches of breaking GDPR.

If you have a role-based email such as chair@abcu3a.co.uk then you can choose this as a reply address. If it is set in u3a Officer then when you send an email you can choose the reply address either your personal one as in your membership details or your officer one.

All emails go from noreply@beacon.u3a.org.uk, but please be aware that if you just reply to this email it will go to the expected person.

John Alexander

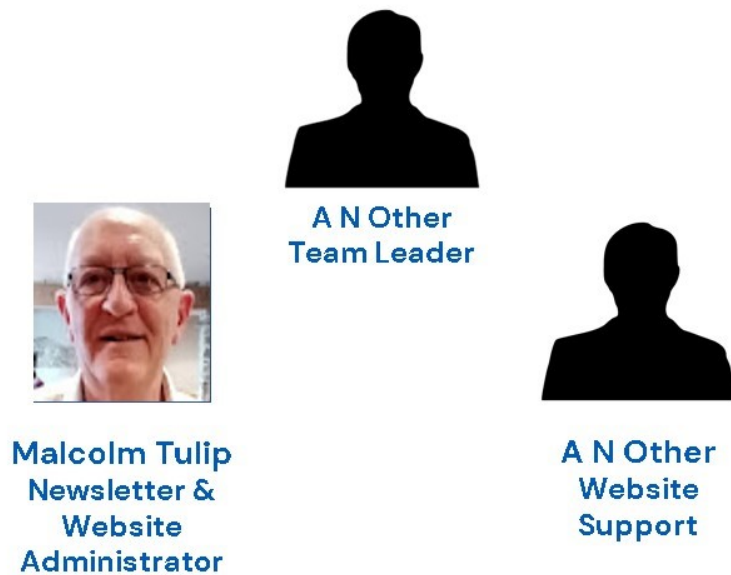
Training and Documentation Lead

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.

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