

Beacon Newsletter: October 2020



The Beacon 2 pilot scheme – and how you can be part of it



It's always been the plan that the Beacon Upgrade Project will involve Beacon users at every stage. With your help we will ensure that Beacon 2 meets the needs of every u3a.

One way we are doing this is by including various pilot stages throughout the project. The first of these will take place during the development itself, and once this is complete another, bigger, pilot

phase will start.

Once a functional module of Beacon 2, such as the Membership Management module, is complete, a mid-development pilot will be triggered. This means that we will invite users to try out the new module and give us their feedback. This feedback will then be used to improve that module and to guide future software development. It'll also give us the opportunity to road-test any documentation and training materials that have been produced.

This process will repeat throughout the development as more and more modules are completed.

At the end of the development phase, we'll start an early adoption phase. This means that we'll invite the first u3as to migrate fully onto Beacon 2 and begin using it to manage their activities. We'll use this phase to make final adjustments to the software and to finalise the process for rolling out Beacon 2 to all Beacon users.

You may be wondering, how can our u3a get involved in the pilot phases? Several u3as have already expressed an interest in participating, and all are welcome to do so. You can register by using the form at the bottom of the page. If you have already filled this form out and indicated you're registering on behalf of your u3a, you don't need to do it again.

The number of pilot u3as will be limited so we can't guarantee that everyone who registers will be able to take part. We will ensure a wide range of u3as are included to reflect the different sizes and styles of u3a.

If you're not already using Beacon, there is still time to sign up now and be among the existing users who migrate to Beacon 2 next year.

To find out more about Beacon or to enquire about the pilots email info@beacon.u3a.org.uk.

Beacon can help your u3a now – don't delay!



Are you considering joining the Beacon family, but are waiting for Beacon 2? Then we suggest that you go ahead and adopt the existing Beacon.

There are some 450 u3as waiting to move over to Beacon 2. The process will be largely automatic but the data in Beacon is important. It's vital that each u3a checks its data carefully as they move to Beacon 2, and the Beacon Upgrade team will be busy helping u3as with this process.

If your u3a is waiting to join Beacon then it can do so in one of two ways. It could move across to the existing Beacon as soon as it's ready. There are Beacon supporters waiting to help you make the move, and they know what they're doing. The journey to Beacon will almost certainly be smooth and painless. Once Beacon 2 is released you can migrate to Beacon 2 at a time to suit you. There's a substantial team in place waiting to migrate u3as and they will be skilled in making the move as easy as possible.

The alternative approach is to wait for Beacon 2. Of course, we'll be happy to see you, but the Beacon team's emphasis during the migration period will be on getting existing users across. You are less likely to be able to move onto Beacon at a time of your choosing until the migration of existing Beacon users is complete.

But it's your decision. If you'd like to talk it through with a member of the Beacon team then contact info@beacon.u3a.org.uk.

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Beacon People – Frank Bailey



Beacon Beacon People is a series of posts about u3a volunteers working on the Beacon project. Today we feature Frank Bailey, the Beacon national support lead. Frank's role is demanding. Not only does he oversee the current Beacon system but he's also the senior member of the Beacon 2 team. This is what Frank told Beacon News.

What is your name?

Frank Bailey.

What u3a do you belong to?

Ripon and District.

What is your role in the Beacon team?

National support lead.

What does your role entail?

With the help of the Beacon Project Executive Officer and the support of eight Beacon Management Team leaders, I ensure that current Beacon system is being maintained and that the Beacon Two development program is on track and that our suppliers have all the information that they require to deliver the product. The Beacon Team are working hard to make sure that all 446 u3a's using Beacon and their 220,000 members are supported.

What do you like best about your work with the Beacon team?

Motivating people to think out of the box, no issue is unsurmountable, there is always a solution.

What are your greatest challenges?

Ensuring the work is delivered from the supplier in a timely manner and reflects the needs of u3a's. Providing a system which u3a members can use to effectively manage their u3a's and benefit their members.

What message do you have for Beacon users?

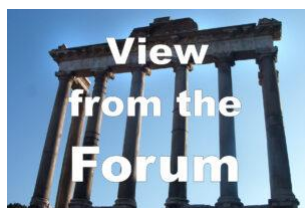
Beacon2 is being developed to cover all existing elements of Beacon with the addition of an upgraded finance system. All this and an integrated website, where members can receive

detail of things that they are interested in or involved with at the point of log on.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Finally I would like to say thank you to all of the Beacon Team for their hard work and patience during the specification and development phase of Beacon2 and to all the u3a members who have provided us with suggestions and ideas of how Beacon can be improved.

Will Beacon 2 be able to



The most popular question on the Forum is “Will Beacon 2 enable me to?” or, as a suggestion, “I would like Beacon to be enhanced to ...” Unfortunately there is often no answer, the reason being that all that is known about the functionality of the software is what is contained in the specifications which aim to ensure that the functionality of the existing Beacon is maintained, with no guarantee that the detailed behaviour will be the same. A lot will depend upon the approach adopted by the programmer(s) and until the software is delivered no one in the Beacon team knows the answers. The software is now (October) beginning to be delivered and the Beacon test team are evaluating the first deliveries but the detailed behaviour and possibilities often depend upon modules yet to delivered.

Many people will think that the Beacon team **should** know since it should have been included in the specification. However such a detailed specification would have been impractical to write and would have ensured that the software was late and over budget (unless an incredibly generous programme timescale and financial budget was allowed). The knock-on effect of insisting on the implementation of a seemingly minor requirement has to be experienced to be believed.

It takes a particular mindset to read all the specifications and fit them together to envisage the finished product. To be honest it is easier to consider the existing Beacon and trust that divergences are not too great.

For example I understand that the existing system of polls in Beacon will not be retained but that lists of members will be created by a selection based on information stored about each member. How effective this will be as a replacement for polls will depend on the information stored and the design of the selection process. (UPDATE I am informed polls will be retained in the form of Tags which can be set against a member's record and there will be the facility to filter member lists to show only members linked or not linked to a Tag or Tags)

When our U3A adopted Beacon we didn't know exactly how it would work but felt confident that it was better than our existing systems. To a certain extent we had to fit into Beacon's way of organising things and to accept its limitations. To some extent this will be true of Beacon 2 and I can already envisage the howls of protest when some favoured operational process will not be possible with Beacon 2. In some cases it may be possible to modify Beacon 2 – much more easily than making changes to Beacon 1. However all such things come at cost. I am sure that 'bugs' will be fixed but at times one person's 'bug' is another person's feature.

For the time being I look forward to the rollout of Beacon 2 as soon as possible – but that's another question!