

Beacon Newsletter : June 2020



Needed: Enthusiastic trainers for Beacon Upgrade



Are you a good communicator? Could you be one of the trainers helping U3As to use their upgraded Beacon system? Then we'd like to hear from you.

The upgrade has been designed to be easy to use, but there will be differences between the original and upgraded systems. This is inevitable as we seek to improve the existing system and to meet modern accessibility standards. To help U3As to get up to speed a

training plan is being prepared. That's where you come in.

Training over 430 U3As is no small task so the Beacon Team needs new members. If you've been a trainer, training manager or teacher then please volunteer. The same applies if you're a good communicator in other ways. Did your business presentations wow the audience? Do your after-dinner speeches bring the house down? Please get in touch.

We also need people to help with the planning and administration of the training, and we need people for other roles with varying levels of involvement in the Beacon Team.

Join the team. Email recruitment@beacon.u3a.org.uk.

Join the Conversation on the Beacon User Forum



The Beacon User Forum is a place for Beacon Users to discuss anything to do with Beacon, from hints and tips to the complexities of the finance module.

Have you a tip on how to use Beacon? Are you looking for advice on best practice? Would you like to talk about the upcoming Beacon Upgrade with fellow Beacon users? Perhaps you're having

trouble using a feature, but aren't sure whether the problem is with Beacon or with the way you're trying to do it?

In each case the Beacon User Forum can help. The User Forum is the place anyone from the wider Beacon community can go to discuss anything that crosses their mind, from problems with email delivery, the best ways to use group ledgers or your thoughts on how to handle lapsed members.

The Beacon forum has over 11000 posts on 1900 topics from the 2248 registered users. It demonstrates the U3A ethos of mutual learning and help, and should be your first port of call whenever you'd like to talk something over with fellow Beacon users.

Join the conversation at <https://forum.u3abeacon.org.uk>.

Beacon Upgrade Several Steps Nearer



The Beacon team has made significant progress in many areas, both in Beacon itself and in the team organisation., Despite the lockdown the Beacon Upgrade project has been making progress on many fronts.

Beacon and APT, the Beacon Update developers, agreed a list of features some time ago, but that list is being revised as work on the implementation proceeds.

Work on the detailed specification is proceeding apace, with significant progress on membership, groups and finance.

The work mapping the database layout between the existing and updated Beacon systems is now complete, so it's possible to transfer user data from the old to the new system. Several U3As have now given permission for their Beacon data to form the basis of the data set used for further development and testing work, so the teams can ensure that the upgraded software meets the requirements of all Beacon users.

Internally, the pool of Beacon Upgrade volunteers has been completely reorganised, with six new teams created to manage all aspects of the project. An early result of this new structure has been the creation of the new documentation library in the Beacon Help Centre. This will be the home for all existing and new end-user Beacon documents.

Other teams are working on testing the new system, developing training, and planning a Beacon Upgrade roadshow.

Would you like to help? Email recruitment@beacon.u3a.org.uk.

Our Fantastic Beacon Volunteers



For Volunteers Week this year, we are highlighting the Beacon Team and the work they do to deliver the Beacon service to U3As.

Beacon is a U3A management system designed by U3A members for U3As. Beacon enables U3A administrators to manage their membership, groups and finance through a simple yet functional

interface.

Beacon is packed with features to make U3A volunteers' lives easier. Group leaders can securely email their group members, secretaries can produce a TAM spreadsheet in just a few clicks and treasurers can track receipts and payments - all in one U3A-dedicated system. Over 400 U3As now choose Beacon for their administration, and between them they have a quarter of a million members. They are supported by a dedicated team of U3A volunteers, the Beacon Team, based all across the UK.

Beacon Team members have a variety of roles and responsibilities, and all their work supports U3As and their use of Beacon. From testing changes to the software to demonstrating the system to new users, and from preparing user guides to recruiting new team members, each member plays their part in ensuring all U3As that wish to use Beacon can do so.

Since the lockdown began, we've heard several stories from U3As who've found Beacon to be a vital way of keeping in touch with their members. All Beacon data is stored on the cloud, which means authorised users can all access the same version, ensuring accurate recordkeeping.

Many Beacon Team members are also involved in the Beacon Upgrade Project, which will ensure the system is fit for purpose for U3As both now and into the future. There are six

dedicated sub-Teams for the project, each made up of and led by U3A volunteers from the Beacon Team.

It is not possible to talk about Beacon without also mentioning the Beacon administrators, who play a key role in supporting their local U3A, preparing their data for importing, and providing training to users within their U3A. Their efforts enable U3As to carry out their administration more easily and more safely with Beacon.

Beacon is a great example of the U3A ethos in action, with members helping members, learning being shared and expertise being pooled. The Upgrade Project will put Beacon on a strong footing into the future, but it wouldn't be possible without volunteers.

So, to the whole Beacon community: thank you.

If you'd like to join the Beacon team then please email recruitment@beacon.u3a.org.uk.