

SHARED PRACTICE GUIDE – WEBSITE PROGRAM SELECTION

Rev 02

1. INTRODUCTION

Our shared practice guides (SPG) are a vehicle to share knowledge between the U3As in the London area. They are created by putting together knowledge and experiences from those U3As. They are only a guide – what worked for one U3A might not work for your U3A. If in your experience something is wrong or you disagree with something, please write in to allow an update to be created and published. It's hoped these Guides will grow over time with more shared experiences.

2. SCOPE

This guide is particularly to help new U3As as they are forming and are thinking about setting up a website for their U3A. It may also help existing U3As who might be thinking of upgrading or switching to a different program for their existing website. This SPG discusses website programs only. It does not cover website domain hostings or other related topics.

3. BACKGROUND

There was a review conducted of the websites of the 44 London U3As in July 2019. At that time over half of these U3As used the generic 'Site Builder' website program provided centrally by the Third Age Trust. The other U3As used a variety of different programs. It was interesting that, even where U3As were using the same program, the look, style and design of the website can be quite different. A survey questionnaire was sent out in 2019 to all London Region U3As that had a website to ask them about the pros and cons of their current web program.

4. LEARNINGS

It tends to be that each U3A defends their choice of website design program – naturally. The key decision process revolves around skill level within the U3A – current and future. The generic Site Builder has been designed so it can be implemented and maintained by U3A members with no particular coding skills. It is designed to provide the functions that U3As need in particular (eg Groups listing, Events diary, etc). However it has limited style choices and functionality so one U3A website looks similar to another (is that a bad or good thing?). It's a safe choice if there is any doubt about what skill level will be available to support the U3A's website.

Having said all of the above, about 20 London U3As have gone with a different website program. Some of these choices might have been decisions taken before Site Builder was available but others perhaps chose a different, a more advanced program, to provide a better, more sophisticated, looking website. Particularly if that U3A had some advanced IT skills available.

At the time of writing this SPG there was one London U3A that has outsourced their website (the creation and maintenance of it). This is a choice and may be taken if a sophisticated website is required and/ or the skills required are not available within that U3A. However, it is suggested that if this decision is being considered due to skill level availability, then the simple Site Builder program is not fully understood (and hence a realisation that non-specialist skills are all that is required). Often the challenge for U3A websites is more a

matter of keeping the material updated. Outsourcing might seem to solve this challenge, but someone still needs to feed the updates to the selected external company and therefore this is not a real solution.

There is also the matter of cost, since Site Builder is a free program, and free support is given if you cannot understand the instructions that accompany each page.

This SPG doesn't give one answer on this issue. It does depend on each U3A's situation. Each U3A will make an informed choice based on skills available in that U3A.

5. REFERENCE MATERIALS

There is no particular equivalent advice provided on this subject through Third Age Trust's Advice section of their website or other U3A sources. There is more information available about Site Builder through Third Age Trust.

While most U3As feel the website design (and maintenance of it) should not be outsourced. If you are thinking of doing this, and want a WordPress based site then this contact may be useful: <https://arcticonline.com/offers-u3a/>

This company has apparently now done design for two London U3As (not verified). They are now offering to design a website for any other U3A based on their experience of doing these two. Charge for a one-off design - perhaps £500 (not verified). That would certainly be a very competitive price for a professional design. The question of how simple it is to make updates of various types to the content is probably the most important question.

6. CONTACT POINT

There is a LRU3A IT/Webmaster Peer Group which can offer further guidance on website programs. Contact should be made through: webmaster.londonregionu3a@gmail.com
Peter Sellars of Tower Hamlets U3A has offered advice and guidance for any U3A considering the use of WORDPRESS.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Survey Questionnaire

The spreadsheet referenced above collating the responses from the survey questionnaire is available on request. It's not included here as it wouldn't be readable when pasted into a WORD format. Use the contact details above if you do want a copy sent to you.

Appendix 2 – London U3As Using Site Builder

Name of U3A	Using generic Site Builder?
Beckenham	Yes
Croydon	Yes
Dagenham	Yes
Dulwich	Yes
Ealing	Yes
Hammersmith and Fulham	Yes
Havering	Yes
Hillingdon	Yes
Hounslow	Yes

London South East	Yes
Northwood	Yes
Norwood	Yes
Orpington	No, changed
Palmers Green/Southgate	Yes
Redbridge	Yes
Richmond upon Thames	Yes
Stanmore and District	Yes
Upminster	Yes
Waltham Forest	Yes
Wandsworth	Yes
Wanstead & Woodford	Yes
Welling	Yes
Greater London South East network	Yes
Surrey U3A network	Yes
London Region of U3As network	Yes
TOTAL:	26

Appendix 3 – Variety of Other Programs Used

The following summarises the use of other website programs used by London Region U3As (in 2019):

Name of U3A	If not, what else?
Abbey Wood and Thamesmead	Community Web Kit, BT
Barnet	not shown
Bexley	Xara
Brent	not shown
Bromley	Microsoft Expression
Crouch End & District	Wordpress
Enfield	not shown
Hackney	not shown
Hampstead Garden Suburb	not shown
Harrow	Weebly
Islington	Dreamweaver
Kenton and District	not shown
Kingston	56degrees.co.uk
Merton	not shown
Mill Hill	Tesseract
North London (Highgate, Muswell Hill & Finchley)	Wordpress
Orpington	Conceptulise CMS
Sidcup	not shown
Sutton	100% Windpower
Tower Hamlets	Wordpress
U3A in London (wide area around Belsize Park)	not shown
Haringey	NO WEBSITE
Hillingdon South	NO WEBSITE