

SHARED PRACTICE GUIDE – WEBSITE PROGRAM SELECTION

Rev 03

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. In 2024 / 25 Sitebuilder was closed down and all u3as using this program were migrated to SiteWorks. SiteWorks is based on the international web programme WordPress, but with functionality added tailored to u3a needs.

4. LEARNINGS

The generic SiteWorks programme is designed so that u3a members can set up and maintain a website without coding skills. It provides the functions u3as typically need, such as group listings and an events diary. It is well supported by u3a volunteers – with guides, a help desk and regular drop in support sessions. It is therefore a safe choice when there is uncertainty about the skills available to support a u3a's website.

More u3as are migrating to SiteWorks But about 10 London u3as have gone with a different website program. Some of these choices might have been decisions taken before SiteWorks 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 SiteWorks 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 SiteWorks is a low cost program and free support is provided.

This SPG doesn't give one answer on this issue. It aims to provide information so that each u3a can make an informed choice of website programme.

5. REFERENCE MATERIALS

There is no particular equivalent advice provided on this subject through Third Age Trust's Advice section of their website. There is more information available about SiteWorks through their dedicated website: <https://siteworks.u3a.org.uk/>

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 there are various Consultants that will assist you. Charge for a one-off design can be in the range of £1000 (not verified).

6. CONTACT POINT

There is a U3A IT/Webmaster Peer Group which can offer further guidance on website programs. Contact should be made through: webmaster.londonregionu3a@gmail.com

APPENDICES**Appendix 1 – London u3as Using SiteWorks or Other**

(29 out of 43 using SiteWorks)

	Name of U3A	Using SiteWorks	If not, what else?
0	London Region of U3As	Yes	
1	Abbey Wood and Thamesmead	No	Community Web Kit, BT
2	Barnet	No	??
3	Beckenham	Yes	
4	Bexley	Yes	
5	Brent	Yes	being set up in SW
6	Bromley	No	Conceptualise
7	Crouch End & District	No	Siteground/ Wordpress
8	Croydon	Yes	Conceptualise
9	Dagenham	Yes	
10	Dulwich	Yes	
11	Ealing	Yes	
12	Enfield	Yes	
13	Hackney	Yes	
14	Hammersmith and Fulham	Yes	
15	Hampstead Garden Suburb	No	Weebly
16	Harrow	No	Weebly
17	Havering	Yes	
18	Hillingdon	Yes	
	Hillingdon South		
19	Hounslow	Yes	
20	Islington	No	Dreamweaver
21	Kenton and District	No	not shown
22	Kingston	No	56degrees.co.uk
23	Merton	No	not shown
24	Mill Hill	No	Tesseract
25	Newham	Yes	Conceptualise
26	North London (Highgate, Muswell Hill & Finchley)	Yes	
27	Northwood	Yes	
28	Norwood	Yes	
29	Orpington	No	Conceptualise.
30	Palmers Green/Southgate	Yes	
31	Redbridge	Yes	
32	Richmond upon Thames	Yes	
33	London South East	Yes	
34	Sidcup	Yes	
35	Stanmore and District	Yes	
36	Sutton	Yes	
37	Tower Hamlets	No	Wordpress
38	U3A in London (wide area around Belsize Park)	No	not shown
39	Upminster	Yes	
40	Waltham Forest	Yes	
41	Wandsworth	Yes	
42	Wanstead & Woodford	Yes	
43	Welling	Yes	