

Special Bulletin - Upgrade the Network's Internet Services

As Sent 16 July

This Email must be seen by the U3A Association Secretary as the changes planned will need the attention and action of the U3A Committee particularly for U3As using the *.u3anet.org.au hosting service and as technically skilled volunteers are needed this advice should be circulated to:

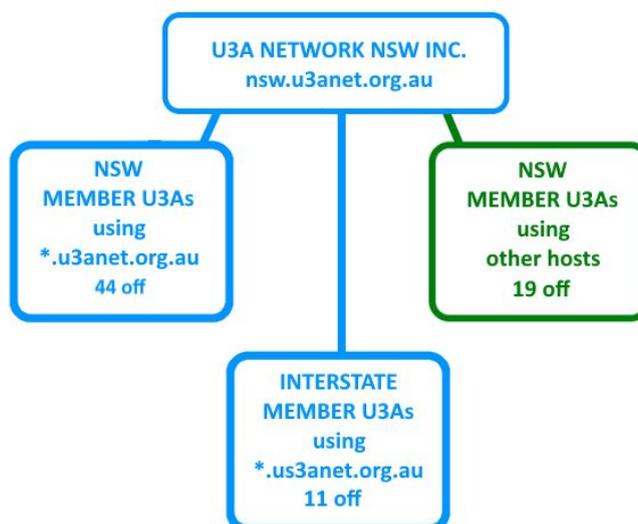
- the U3A's Website Administrator
- any other skilled member of your association, whether or not your Association participates in Networks hosted websites. It is hoped that the larger U3As, who have their own websites will have a skill base that may assist us.

To tailor the volunteer contribution into the requirements of the consultancy please consider this request urgently.

For the attention of each Member U3A Committee AND others with skills that are appropriate for the project.

Further to the [E-Bulletin circulated on Monday 6 July](#) the Network to provide some background and our planned actions and the critical need for a **U3A volunteer contribution** to a project that will be of interest to all member U3As.

U3A Network NSW's web-hosting consists of 44 websites used by U3A NSW Members and another 11 websites used by Interstate U3A Members of our Network. Another 19 U3A NSW Members use other sources for web hosting.



Can you help?

U3A Network NSW is a low 'overhead operation' and all U3A members will understand the Network's decision to pursue the volunteer option as the Network wishes to manage its expenditure carefully. Therefore the Network needs volunteers who have a technical bent who perhaps wish to extend their knowledge without drama!

Listed below are the volunteer tasks that need to be addressed, estimated at, around, of 170 hours (total).

- Create a Wordpress user / per site
- For each website, use Wordpress import, and Widget Importer and Exporter plugin, to transfer content to a new theme x number of sites
- For Cpanel sites that have moved to multisite, transfer zone files; transfer email forwards; back up Cpanel account; copy Cpanel backup to remote storage; remove Cpanel account x number of sites
- Troubleshoot residual, post-transfer problems x number of sites

These tasks are repetitive and, as we have around 60 sites, they will involve a series of tasks for each website to be 'moved' and reconfigured. The job is too much for one volunteer, hence the Network wishes to connect with four to six people who could assist with what is a once-off and finite project.

Skills that are needed:

1. Willing to be 'trained' to perform the specified tasks.
2. WordPress with cPanel experience - desirable, NOT mandatory.
3. Technical (geek) skills with experience such as setting up software or hardware on PCs and/or other IT systems.
4. Reliable internet connection with the ability to log-on and perform a series of tasks such as moving content and accurately enter the necessary settings on a per-site basis.
5. Maintaining a diary of issues, should they arise.
6. Report, as necessary to the **Liaison Contact**.

The Network must identify potential volunteers to allow the planning of the timeline of the implementation phase. We seek an Expression of Interest and that is what it means! You'll likely wish to know more before you commit to involvement as a member of such a team.

The dot points above will be 'fleshed out' to provide the volunteers with adequate detail of what needs to be done. Appropriate training is being developed.

BACKGROUND

All of the existing U3A Network NSW hosted sites are configured as standard WordPress sites, that is, the site user (each U3A) is responsible for all content that is displayed on their website AND they are responsible for the maintenance of website functions related to keeping the WordPress software up to date together with addressing site problems that may develop. The Network has, over the years, supplied volunteer support at Server level and on occasions has provided advice on how to resolve individual site problems. The system has been volunteer supervised since its inception in 2008.

Many of our site *Web Admins are struggling to perform their role and with the geographic spread of our website users, the Network's training actions have been occasional, ad-hoc and unable to reach all who may have benefited from some tutoring.

* Web Admin is used in this document rather than the term Webmaster

The Server had a 'meltdown' and a loss of service for a number of days in May 2020. After evaluation, it was identified that the problem was caused by shortcomings in the oversight of the Server. Prior to this incident the Network Management Committee had been exploring options to improve the integrity of the service and to address known shortcomings in the setup.

The Committee resolved to seek advice in the form of a professional assessment of our Network Web-Hosting Service with respect to its security and efficacy. The report (June 2020) has provided a critical appraisal and a recommended improvement strategy.

The Network Management Committee has approved the redevelopment of our web-hosting service with the key principles of **better support** to Member U3As and **enhanced security** (including greater reliability). The Committee has recognised that many of the 'website member U3As' are finding the existing website system is hard to maintain and Committees often it is a challenge to identify a member from their volunteer team to take on the 'Web Admin' role.

Further, this new arrangement may be of interest to Member U3As that are not using a website or to those member U3As (19) who are using other hosting services or to those who are not yet utilising a website as a communication tool.

The planned upgrade will offer a 'supervised' option of WordPress website structure that is called **Multisite**. When adopted, to most viewers there will be nothing about the website that will be obviously 'multi', while the role of the Web Admin for this class of website will be near 100% content focused due to the 'multi' type of configuration removing virtually all of the responsibility of site 'housekeeping'. Caring for a website will become much simpler and may indeed end up being less onerous.

Once aspect of the **Multisite option** is that the Web Admin is non-technical and it applies to all U3As to a greater or lesser extent is the filling of the position of a retiring Web Admin person. The role is much less demanding than the related Web Admin role with a WordPress 'standard' site. The difference relates to Multisite having a structure that allows the supervisor to globally perform most of the website technical aspects of site management. When the time comes **handover will be less demanding** and as the scope of knowledge required is narrower and the role will be less challenging to the new Web Admin person. This arrangement allows the 'local' U3A Web Admin person to concentrate on the content of their website, without having to address the 'housekeeping' tasks. Perhaps the evolving role will be more aptly described as **Web Editor**.

Here's a link to a comparison (PDF) between WordPress (standard) and WordPress Multisite.

Your website **URL will remain as is**, i.e. [\[your-assoc\].u3anet.org.au](http://your-assoc.u3anet.org.au) while the difference will be the Network's provision of overarching support (that is, the Multisite supervision). The Multisite arrangement will be inherently more robust than our existing setup, with many of the update chores that fall on each site's U3A volunteer being automatically actioned across ALL of the 'multi' configured sites.

This arrangement will also ameliorate two existing risks born by the Network, they are:

1. The U3A volunteer network manager, taking on the key role of supervising a large group of websites in what is clearly a dynamically evolving technology field, and this option will diminish the issue of succession.
2. Absence of regular attention to updates, has led to a number of sites being neglected, such neglect creates a consequential risk to all of our sites. This risk will be significantly reduced.

The 'standard' WordPress website will remain available to those member U3As who have the skills and knowledge to utilise the full gamut of site options.

The 'project' will involve quite a deal of behind the scenes reconfiguration to allow completion of some of the works, that commenced in 2018, with the objective to 'harden' the network. A **quote** has been received for the contractor to perform the complete transitional works and a **second quote**, accepted that will utilise **U3A volunteers** (see below) to perform a series of repetitive tasks that will be adjunct to the higher level work performed by the contractor.

PLANNED ACTIONS

Project Management

Project Manager: Geoff James (Geoff is the Secretary and Public Officer for U3A Network NSW Inc.)

Liaison Contact: Phil Warren (Web Admin for nsw.u3anet.org.au)

About Service Costs

The Network's web-hosting service has been a latter-day miracle, being held at \$50 per year for the last 10 years or so. As our decision is based upon an improved hosting set-up, better security and ongoing professional supervision there will be an increase in the Annual Fee for the service. At this stage we are unable to profile specific details, however, consultation and the 2021 costing of service information will be available to all users in good time.

Future Training

I commented earlier in this message about the issue of web-manager training. Over the years it has proved to be well nigh impossible for the Network to provide structured and ongoing training. In 2020 it is looking like COVID-19 is providing a key to perhaps two options, they may be: 1:1 mentoring and focussed group sessions. Yes, I'm thinking about Zoom or similar being a game-changer to provide targeted assistance to Web Admins in the Network. *Any thoughts about such an approach?*

With lockdown this self-taught WordPress user thought of a basic manual on WordPress (PDF). If you haven't seen it, click the link. Produced prior to the Multisite decision, the document would need some minor adjustments to address the alternate use of Multisite.

Communications

Email communications will be the key to keeping in touch with the stakeholders (and the interested too). This Project needs to have a reliable means of communication with Member U3A associations, both at Committee level AND the key website person. To ensure the success of the project the Network must have a reliable means of communication with U3A associations that will be affected by the planned changes. **Please use this [Google Form](#) to supply your project specific contact information.**

Zoom Sessions

At this time two Zoom sessions [same topics] are being scoped to both inform you and to answer your questions about the project. The Email addresses supplied in the abovementioned form will be used to forward the details and times of the sessions planned at 11 am on Tuesday 21 July OR at 4 pm on Thursday 23 July.

Phil Warren
Delegate to the Network Committee

Discussion with Jackie Stallard 15 July

To JS

Your supplementary comments in Emails have been most helpful

Some issues for discussion:

We are trying to estimate cost per member U3A for 2021

Recent Lack of Hosting oversight:

How do you see oversight working with your plan?

>> Ongoing Costing Components

Physical

Site hosting (Siteground):

Others

e.g. WordFence and what else? *What does Wordfence cover at the moment?*

More sundry fees?

Name Registry

Contractor

Multisite Supervision: say average 15 hours per year

Ongoing Agreement covers:

Extras:

Sundry Issues

Email redirects (manage this aspect of our service)

Thoughts on Email services (minimising the burden on our volunteers)

Archive Storage

DropBox or OneDrive or GSuite?

JS Email of 12 July addresses many of my thoughts

Email from JS 12 July

JS proposes no changes to hosting. Siteground provides a good service, and moving hosts is time consuming. So, the websites can remain on Siteground. U3A Net can continue to make an annual hosting payment directly to Siteground.

The Multisite will need little attention once it is set up correctly. Plugin, theme, and minor Wordpress updates will be applied automatically. My role will include:

- Running manual backups before applying major Wordpress updates 3-4 times per year.
- Auditing plugins once per year, in case any have been abandoned by the developers
- Troubleshooting

I'm not sure exactly how many hours this will take per year. I imagine that there will be more to start off with. But then, the initial minor issues will be resolved and I'll rarely be needed. I'd recommend budgeting for 10-20 hours in the first year. After that, it may settle down to 5-10 hours.

Contingency Arrangements; Webhive has an agreement with Mal Barry of Mal Barry Computers, Narooma, to keep things running. However, I don't think that that will be necessary in the case of U3A. U3A will own its hosting. That just leaves the day-to-day Wordpress maintenance. I set systems up to require little maintenance, so the websites would continue to run without me. I think that documentation is the best protection. It can be kept in whatever form suits you (Google Docs, Dropbox?). It would be wise to keep a shared password vault.

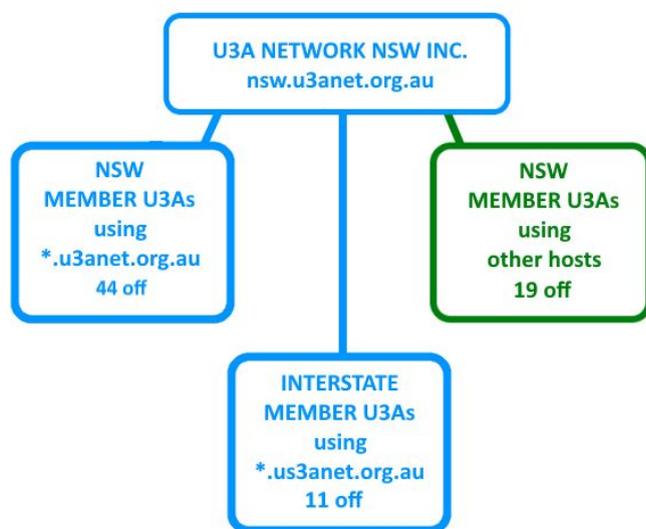
Yes, U3A Net will keep the same URLs.

Training: JS will perfect each process and provide either written documentation or a video. Depending on the number of volunteers, Zoom sessions might also be beneficial. Really, I can do whatever works for you. I'm happy to be flexible.

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Phil Warren

Delegate to the Network Committee

Website Administrator

[U3A Network NSW Inc](#)

<https://nsw.u3anet.org.au/>

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