

Appointing a Centre President guidelines: January 2019

These guidelines were drawn up by the Presidents meeting working group and presented to, and accepted by, the European Chairs Assembly meeting in July 2018.

It is recommended that Centres use the following procedure for appointing new Presidents which involves Centres consulting with the existing Presidents – drawing on their perspective and experience - before appointing a new President. The procedure is informed by the principle of ‘the movement running the movement’. It also aims to keep a balance between local autonomy and initiative, and more movement-wide harmony and commonality.

1) Appointing a New President:

- Every Centre that is part of the ECA should have a President. For smaller Centres and groups please see guidance in the appendix.
- It is suggested that a Centre that is looking for a new President thinks of someone they'd like to ask, or draws up a short-list of people (no more than 3 names) they think are suitable. This is probably a discussion the Centre Council needs to have, though making sure other key Order members in the Centre are consulted.
- Sections 3 and 4 below – listing the ‘role’ and ‘qualities’ of a President – may help your thinking on this. You could also contact the director of the ECA Development Team for suggestions about the kinds of people to be thinking of. Whilst some of the current Presidents are very busy and reluctant to take more Centres on, others may well be interested. At the same time they are looking to bring on a ‘new generation’ of Presidents.
- The responsibility for checking the appointment of new Presidents has been delegated to a “working group” of the Presidents meeting, using the following procedure:
 - If the first person on your shortlist is already a President, then you just go ahead and ask them, although it is good to keep the working group informed, via the European Development Team (Gunabhadri or Aparajita at [Triratna Development](#))
 - If your chosen person(s) are not currently Presidents, then you'd contact Development Team with your shortlist, and they pass this on to the working group. They would then respond to the suggestions, and may just say ‘yes’, or may suggest issues/factors for your council to consider, or

they may want to get into more dialogue about it. In almost all cases, we're confident this process will be pretty quick and straightforward. We imagine Centres will find it helpful to have some experienced people suggesting issues that they might need to consider.

- Once agreement is reached, the Centre goes ahead and contacts the first person on their list. They could also liaise with the Development Team on this, and they and the working group could provide 'back-up' – talking to the candidate, explaining the role to them, encouraging them, and telling them what support will be on offer from the Presidents meeting. We suspect this will increase the chances of someone wanting to take on the role.
- Hopefully, they say yes...but if not, we try the next person!
- When the new President is agreed, they will be invited to attend the Presidents meeting. Currently this is an annual, 4-day meeting, which is designed to be a mix of spiritual inspiration, talking with other Presidents about the role and issues that arise, and any business. It is part of the responsibility that all Presidents make attending this meeting a priority.

2) Ending a Presidential Relationship:

- The idea of a President is that it entails a long-term relationship with a Centre, so that the President gets to know the people around a Centre and understand its history. However, sometimes a President does want to move-on and stop functioning in the role. Or, sometimes a Centre may feel that it is time for a change.
- If both Centre and President are agreed on the President stepping down, the decision is with them.
- However, if one party is unsure about this, then we suggest the Centre and President consult with the Presidents' working group. This just acts as a safeguard – e.g. if a President felt very concerned about what is going on at a given Centre, and also felt that is why the Centre no longer wanted them around.
- If a President wants to hand on they need to also inform the working group of the Presidents meeting. Ideally the outgoing President will work with a Centre to help find their successor.

3) The Role and Value of a President:

The value of a Centre having a President could be summarized under three headings:

Connection:

The President is someone who will have a regular and long-term connection with a Centre and the people involved in it. In this time, they can develop a sense of trust and understanding and be a kalyana mitra to the Chairperson and key people. They can build up a historical perspective on the life of the Centre through their long-term involvement; they may have been involved in the Centre longer than anyone else! Sometimes Centres choose Presidents who have lived and worked at that Centre in the past, and who will already have that historical connection, but this isn't always possible.

Perspective:

The President is an experienced Order member who has a good working understanding of, and harmony with, the principles of the Dharma, Bhante's teaching, and the approach of Triratna. As well as building up a historical perspective of the Centre, they have a mature and experienced perspective on Triratna and Dharma practice. Perhaps they've been a Centre chair or mitra convenor in the past. They are likely to be aware of, and part of, the flow and life of the Movement. They can help ensure the Centre is plugged into the central tradition and values of the Movement. The system of Presidents is one of the "unifying forces" – ensuring a harmonious and coherent Triratna.

Helping:

Because of this connection and perspective, the President is in a particular position to help the Centre. For example:

- a) They may help at a time of transition, or when succession planning; during periods where a Centre has no chair they can provide some sense of stability and continuity.
- b) They may be involved in teaching, giving talks, or leading retreats, thereby helping provide inspiration, confidence, and spiritual depth to a situation.
- c) They may also be able to act as Preceptor to men or women at your Centre. Though this might be a consideration, especially if there are no other private preceptors at your Centre, you do want to make sure your President would be able to be available to the Centre as a President, and not just focusing on preceptor relationships.
- d) They may have experience and know-how in running a Centre – organisationally, financially, as well as spiritually. As someone who isn't directly

involved on a day-to-day basis, they may be able to give advice that is more impartial and independent.

e) In a time of conflict, they may be someone who has the trust and goodwill to help mediate.

Note: In the past, Presidents have not become trustees or legal office-holders of Centre charities, as they are not involved day-to-day and not able to take that kind of direct responsibility. It is the trustees (i.e. Centre Councils) who ultimately carry both the spiritual and legal responsibility for the Centre. The President is there more as a friend and outside helper.

4) Qualities of a President:

The following list suggests the kinds of qualities to look for. In some cases what is presented is the 'ideal' and there may be the need to be more flexible and adaptable. But the list provides a guide to the issues that need to be thought-through

- They need to have been ordained for 15+ years – i.e. they are an experienced Order member, with a maturity and stability in their Going for Refuge. They will have experience of working for Triratna; perhaps they will be an ex-chair or mitra convenor, or perhaps they will have a historical connection with the Centre.
- They need to be spiritually inspired and effective, to have no serious doubts about Bhante and the Triratna approach to the Dharma. They will be able to exemplify and communicate the Triratna tradition.
- They will be in good communication with their own Preceptors and Kalyana Mitras, and active in the life of the Order and movement, and connected-in through effective friendships and relationships.
- They need to be trusted, and able to communicate with a wide range of Order members, Mitras, and friends around a Centre, able to listen to different perspectives, help 'hold' and facilitate discussion on controversial issues, and offer guidance on the spiritual principles involved.
- They need to have the time and energy to be President. A common pattern is that Presidents spend a week per year at their Centre. This is really the minimum. Especially during times of transition, difficulty or disharmony, or when big decisions are being made, more time and contact will be needed. They also

need to think of being a President on a long-term basis – perhaps they will be President over the time that several chairs are in office.

- They also need to have time to attend the Presidents meeting – currently a 4-day meeting in May. The meeting is not a heavy business meeting, and is designed to be a support to Presidents in their work, and also to link them in with each other.

Contacts

To communicate with the Presidents' working group or for more information please contact the European Development Team:

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