

## A Co-ordinating Structure for the Triratna Buddhist Community

### Introduction

In an interview published in May 2009 as *What is the Western Buddhist Order?*, Sangharakshita spoke of the need for a coordinating structure for the Order and Movement:

*The Public Preceptors, because of their spiritual responsibilities, clearly have the key position in [the overall architecture of the Order and Movement], but there are various groupings of senior Order members who have overlapping responsibilities that, between them, cover the whole Order and Movement:*

*Public Preceptors, Private Preceptors, Chairmen and Chairwomen, Presidents, Order Convenors, Mitra Convenors, Chapter Convenors. There needs to be some liaison between them all so they are not each just going their separate ways or coming into some sort of conflict. I know that a process of liaison has been started and I am hoping that that will result in much clearer collective objectives for those particular bodies and perhaps some overall structure. We definitely need such a structure if we are to be effective...'*

On the basis of this request from Bhante, the Preceptors' College made a proposal for how such a structure might work. The essence of the proposal was quite simple: given that we need a structure for coordination between the Order, College and Movement, we proposed a new Council in each of our six main geographical Areas (we decided to use the terminology of Areas and to keep region for smaller geographical areas e.g. the different regions in the UK) bringing together representatives chosen by the Order, College and Movement; and a new International Council meeting every two years, that would bring together those people from each of the Areas.

The structure has a number of aims:

- to support unity and harmony throughout the Triratna Community
- to facilitate the flow of kalyana mitrata, and to give everyone in a position of responsibility access to guidance and support, by peers and by more experienced Order members.
- to maintain throughout the Movement core spiritual values and standards, deriving from Bhante's presentation of the Dharma, and to make sure that new developments are based on those core values.
- to give us a structure for effective decision-making and co-ordination at every level within the Order and Movement, from the local to the international.
- to provide a way to consult throughout the Order and Movement, so decisions on matters that concern all Order members can be made with a high degree of participation, and take into consideration the widest range of views.

Over the course of 2010-11, the Public Preceptors discussed this proposal with other Order Members, particularly with those groupings of Order Members who carry the responsibilities Bhante describes. The discussion itself was an important first step towards more international co-ordination. We discussed the proposal with the European Private Preceptors in Spring 2010; in Summer 2010 we discussed it with the European Chairs at Padmaloka; the Indian Chairs, Chapter Convenors, Ordination teams and Mitra Convenors at Bhaja; and with the Order, Order Convenors, Ordination teams and Chairs at the North American convention at Aryaloka. We talked to each of the Latin American Chairs. Parami and Mahamati invited discussion at the European

Order Weekend in August 2010 (there is a report on the Order website), and also invited comments from all Order members through notices in Shabda and via the Order information email service. In January 2011, we discussed the structure at the new Australasian Regional Meeting, and again with the European Chairs. A working group of Public Preceptors, Order Convenors and Chairs revised the proposal, taking into account the feedback we had received over the year. Finally, we discussed the revised proposal with Bhante, who gave it his blessing.

At the end of these discussions, we have a structure which we hope will enable the Order and Movement to co-ordinate internationally, which enshrines key principles, which has the broad agreement and participation of the main groupings of Order, College and Movement worldwide, and which has been endorsed by Sangharakshita. The International Council will conduct a regular review of the structure, in which all Order members will be invited to participate, to measure how effectively the structure is meeting its objectives.

The first meeting of the new International Council will take place at Padmaloka, from August 22-27.

Dhammarati,  
Chair,  
Preceptors' College  
13 July, 2011

## **Aims and Key elements of the Structure**

### **Aims of the Structure**

i

#### *Kalyana Mitrata*

to enable the flow of *kalyana mitrata* throughout the Triratna Community, so that the spirit of spiritual friendship on the basis of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels informs the whole community, valuing the responsibility and freedom that we each have for our own spiritual lives, and the value of guidance from those more spiritually experienced than ourselves.

ii

#### *Ethical and Spiritual Standards*

to ensure that all aspects of the Triratna Community, especially new developments, are based on our core spiritual values, deriving from Urgyen Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma, and to maintain ethical and spiritual standards throughout the Movement.

iii

#### *Unity and Harmony*

to facilitate unity and harmony throughout the Triratna Community, so that everyone can have confidence that they share the same spiritual values.

iv

#### *Guidance and Support*

to give everyone in a position of responsibility access to guidance and support, by peers and by more experienced Order members.

v

#### *Effective Decision-Making and Co-ordination*

to facilitate effective decision-making and co-ordination at every level within the Order and Movement, from the local to the international.

vi

#### *Consultation and Participation*

to provide a way to consult throughout the Triratna Buddhist Order and Movement, so decisions on those matters that concern all Order members can be made with the highest degree of participation and take into consideration the widest range of views.

### **Key elements of the structure**

The structure has been developed taking into account:

i

the 'key position' of the Public Preceptors' College in the architecture of the Movement as a whole;

ii

the important overlapping responsibilities of groupings of senior order members;

iii

the need for liaison between those groupings to maintain unity and harmony;

iv

the formulation of common objectives and strategy for greater effectiveness;

v

continuity with what is already in place.

## **The Triratna Community Structure**

### **Section 1 / The basic structure: Strands and Areas**

#### **1.1.**

##### **The 'Strands'**

The Triratna Buddhist Community worldwide is organised into three **strands** that are more or less discrete for decision-making purposes:

##### **The Order strand:**

Order members, Chapters and other Order gatherings.

##### **The Movement strand:**

centres and other organisations.

##### **The College strand:**

matters connected with Ordination.

#### **1.2**

##### **Co-ordination within each strand**

The Public Preceptors' College coordinates the work of the College worldwide.

The International Order Convenors in co-operation with Area and local convenors, oversee the effective functioning of the Order worldwide.

No international structure exists for the Movement strand at present.

Each strand may choose to develop further structures and bodies for better coordination internationally.

#### **1.3**

##### **Areas**

The Triratna Community worldwide is also organised 'horizontally' on the basis of geography, similarity of culture or language, or ease of communication into a number of major **Areas**.

At present it is most convenient to group the Triratna Community into six such Areas:

Mainland Europe,

Latin America,

North America

South Asia,

South Pacific,

UK and the Republic of Ireland,

As the Triratna Community grows and its demography changes, adjustments can be made to the number of Areas and the geographical and cultural Areas grouped under each.

#### **1.4**

##### **Coordination of the individual strands within the Areas**

Each strand in the Area will establish, in whatever way it chooses, meetings at Area level for its own coordination and decision-making.

The meeting of the **Movement Strand**, for example a Chairs Meeting, will co-ordinate chairs of centres and other key organisations within an Area.

The meeting of the **College Strand** will co-ordinate the Public Preceptors' kula/s in that Area.

The meeting of the **Order Strand** will co-ordinate Area Order and Chapter Convenors.

### **1.5**

#### **Area Councils, the International Council, and the Steering Group**

See [section 2](#)

The three strands will coordinate with each other within each Area through the Area Council.

See [section 3](#)

All strands and Areas will co-ordinate internationally through the International Council.

See [section 4](#)

Coordination will be carried out between meetings of the International Council by a Steering Group.

### **1.6**

#### **Regions**

Within each Area it may be appropriate to establish a number of smaller regions: groupings of activities within particular geographical Areas or on some other basis.

Decisions about the establishment and functioning of such regions would be made in consultation with all concerned by the Area Council.

## Section 2 / The Area Councils

Each Area of the Triratna Community will have an Area Council to coordinate Community activities, within the Area and with other Areas.

### 2.1

#### Primary Membership

Each Area Council will be made up of six members, two each from the Order, College, and Movement strands within the Area.

Each strand will appoint members to the Area Council in whatever way it chooses.

#### 2.1.1

##### The Order

The women's and men's wings of the Order in the Area will each appoint one member. The two members will, at the discretion of the Area Order strand, normally be the men's and women's Order Convenors for the Area.

#### 2.1.2

##### The College:

Two members will be appointed by the public preceptors responsible for ordinations in that Area. Wherever possible, a man and a woman will be appointed respectively by the public preceptors' kula/s responsible for men's and women's training. Wherever possible representatives will be public preceptors, but where appropriate a private preceptor or ordination team member working in the Area may be appointed.

#### 2.1.3

##### The Movement:

The centre chairs in the Area will appoint two of their number.

#### 2.1.4

##### Duration of Appointments:

Appointments to the International council will normally be for four years, allowing attendance at two International Council meetings. Representatives may be re-elected. The relevant Area strands may review appointments of their representatives before their term of appointment ends.

#### 2.1.5

##### Qualifications for membership of the Area Council:

Members of the Area Council will:

- i. be experienced Order members, who have the confidence and support of their colleagues in their own area of responsibility;
- ii. understand and support the spiritual and organisational principles of the Triratna Community;
- iii. have an effective spiritual practice, and be able to apply their understanding of the Dharma in their own experience;
- iv. be in harmony with the spirit of the Order, active in its life, with no major unaddressed difficulties with other Order members.
- v. have shown an ability to work collaboratively, with Public Preceptors, their colleagues, and other Order members.
- vi. be active members of the strand meeting they are representing, so that they are able to support effectively co-ordination of the different strands in each Area.

It's not always possible to resolve conflicts to everyone's satisfaction. In that case we would like the proposed representative to have done everything they could to resolve such difficulties.

- vii. make attending Area and International Council meetings a priority.
- viii. The meeting will take place in English, so it is preferable if members can speak English well.

#### 2.1.6

##### **Co-option to the Area Council:**

The Area Council may, at its discretion, co-opt members from other groups of Order members with responsibilities in the Area, for example, Mitra Convenors.

#### 2.1.7

##### **Membership of the International Council:**

The six members of the Area Council will automatically be members of the International Council. Co-opted members will not take part in the International Council.

## **2.2**

### **Responsibilities of the Area Council**

#### 2.2.1

##### **Flow of Kalyana Mitrata:**

Facilitating the flow of kalyana mitrata and spiritual and organisational guidance flow throughout the Area.

#### 2.2.2

##### **Co-ordination:**

Co-ordinating the various activities and systems of the Triratna Community in the Area, in co-operation with the Order, Movement, and College Strand Meetings in that Area, so that all aspects of the Triratna Community in the Area work harmoniously and effectively together.

#### 2.2.3

##### **Standards and Effectiveness:**

Ensuring that all the coordinating structures in the Area work effectively and that spiritual and organisational standards are maintained within the Area.

#### 2.2.4

##### **Strategic Overview:**

Maintaining an overview of the Triratna Community activities and strategy in the Area, and bringing important issues and possible initiatives to the attention of the meetings of the various strands in the Area and other Area Councils.

#### 2.2.5

##### **International Co-operation:**

Working with the International Council and with other Area Councils to maintain the unity, harmony, and effectiveness of the Triratna Community worldwide, on the basis of Urgyen Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

**Powers 1**  
We're anticipating that the Area Councils will develop at different rates in different Areas. Some area councils will be able to work in this way from the beginning; some will move towards this kind of role over time.

**Powers 2**  
One of the questions asked in most of the regional discussions was about the 'powers' of the Area and International meetings. The simplest solution seemed to be that the meetings could make decisions on any matter delegated to it and agreed by those taking part, in the same way that a Chairs' meeting can make decisions only with the consent of centre councils.

**Decision-making**  
Though the meetings will always aim to reach decisions by consensus, many of the UK Triratna charities have this provision in their constitutions, in case of deadlock. On the basis of that precedent, at the suggestion of the order and movement representatives in the working party, we added this qualification.

## **2.3 Powers, decision-making, and frequency of Area meeting**

### **2.3.1 Powers**

The Area Council may make decisions on any matter delegated to it by the Strand meetings in that Area.

### **2.3.2 Decision-making**

Decisions will be made by consensus. Should this prove difficult to ascertain then decision shall be by majority vote, the Chairman having the casting vote in the event of a tie.

### **2.3.3 Internal Functioning**

Each Area Council will determine its own working arrangements, in consultation with Area strand meetings.

### **2.3.4 Chairing the Area Council**

Each Area Council will elect a Chair, who will serve for four years, unless otherwise determined by the Council

### **2.3.5 Frequency of meetings**

There will be a meeting of each Area Council at least once a year.

### **2.3.6 Calling meetings**

Meetings of the Area Council will be called by the Chair of the Council at his/her discretion or at the request of any two members of the Council. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that all members can attend each meeting.

### **2.3.7 Quorum**

The quorum will be set by the Area Council.

## **Section 3 / The International Council**

### **3.1 Membership**

#### **3.1.1 Primary Membership**

The International Council will be made up of the six members of each Area Council; and members of the Steering Group.

#### **3.1.2 Co-opted Membership:**

The International Council may co-opt other Order members with movement-wide responsibilities, for example the responsibility for communications inside and outside the community.

### **3.2 Responsibilities and Decision Making**

#### **3.2.1 Coordination**

To co-ordinate the various activities and systems of the Triratna Community.

#### **3.2.2 Cooperation**

To work in co-operation with the Area Councils.

#### **3.2.3 Maintaining Effectiveness:**

To ensure the overall structure works effectively, from the level of chapters, centres, and Public Preceptors' kulas to that of the Area Councils and the International Council.

#### **3.2.4 Maintaining Ethical and Spiritual Standards**

To ensure that ethical standards are maintained throughout the structure and that the Triratna Community remains faithful to the Buddha's teaching as presented by Urygen Sangharakshita.

#### **3.2.5 Maintaining Unity**

To ensure that unity is maintained throughout the Triratna Community and that there is a common basis in principles, practices, and institutions deriving from Urygen Sangharakshita's particular presentation of the Dharma.

#### **3.2.6 Establishing Structures for Consultation**

To establish, in consultation with relevant bodies, structures of dialogue through which consultation can take place and feedback be received at all levels of the Triratna Community.

#### 3.2.7

##### **Initiating and Managing Proposals:**

To initiate consultation and discussion throughout the Triratna Order and Community on matters affecting the Movement worldwide; to make proposals on this basis, with the consent of the Area Councils, and the Public Preceptors' College.

#### 3.2.8

##### **Cooperating with the Steering Group**

To co-operate with the Steering Group, monitor its work to ensure that it is fulfilling its responsibilities, and to assess its decisions for endorsement.

### **3.3**

#### **Powers, decision-making, and frequency of meeting**

##### 3.3.1

###### **Powers**

The International Council may make decisions on any matter delegated to it by the Area Councils.

##### 3.3.2

###### **Decision-making**

Decisions will be made by consensus.

Should this prove difficult to ascertain then decision shall be by majority vote, the Chairman having the casting vote in the event of a tie.

##### 3.3.3

###### **Internal Functioning**

The International Council will determine its own working arrangements, in consultation with Area Councils.

##### 3.3.4

###### **Chairing**

The Chair of the Public Preceptors' College will be the Chair of the International Council. If the College Chair is absent, he or she will arrange for the chairing of the International Council meeting.

##### 3.3.5

###### **Frequency of meetings**

There will be a meeting of the International Council at least every two years.

##### 3.3.6

###### **Calling of meetings**

Meetings of the International Council will be called by the Chair of the Council at his/her discretion or at the request of twenty percent of the members of the Council. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that all members can attend each meeting.

## Section 4 / The International Steering Group

### 4.1 Membership

#### 4.1.1 Membership

The International Steering Group will be made up of seven people, who have an international responsibility in the College, Order, and Movement:  
Two International Order Convenors, for the Order; two representatives of the Movement; and the chair and two deputy chairs of the Public Preceptors' College.

#### 4.1.2 Appointments

Members of the Steering Group will be nominated by the strand to which they belong, and agreed by the College.  
Each strand will develop its own methods for nomination.

#### 4.1.3 Chair

The Steering Group will be chaired by the Chair of the Preceptors' College.  
If the College Chair is absent, he or she will arrange for the Steering Group meeting to be chaired.

### 4.2 Responsibilities

#### 4.2.1 Co-ordination

To co-ordinate the various functions and systems of the Triratna Community as a whole, between Council meetings.

#### 4.2.2 Cooperation

To work in co-operation with the Area Councils.

#### 4.2.3 Monitoring Effectiveness

To make sure the overall structure works effectively, from the level of chapters, centres, and Public Preceptors' kulas, to that of the Area Steering Groups and the International Council.

#### 4.2.4 Maintaining Ethical and Spiritual Standards

To make sure that ethical standards are maintained throughout the structure and that the Triratna Community remains faithful to the Buddha's teaching as presented by Urygen Sangharakshita.

#### Membership

The Order and College have people who have international responsibilities (the International Order Convenors, and the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the College). No-one at the moment in the movement strand has an equivalent international responsibility, and we'd like to ask the movement representatives to work out a mechanism for electing two of their number to the Steering Group. We hope to do this on the Aug meeting

#### Appointments

This provision stimulated some discussion at the European Chair's meeting, and is the only provision in the structure, I think, that has been at all controversial.

It was part of the original proposal, and a provision that Bhante explicitly asked for. It's the one specific proposal that reflects Bhante's suggestion that the Preceptors' College 'have the key position in the overall architecture'. However, it was queried by one of the European Chairs after the meeting in Summer 2010, who was concerned it gave the college too much influence. We discussed it again at the European Chairs' meeting in January 2011, where, as Vajragupta summarised it, 'there were voices questioning whether there was enough of a voice and role for the College in the structure, rather than concerns that there was too much!... The discussion ended with people seeming pretty happy with how it's going.'

After the Chairs' meeting, we informally sounded out a couple of people from other Areas, and discussed and agreed the proposal with the Order Convenors and Chairs in the working group.

#### 4.2.5

##### **Maintaining Unity**

To make sure that unity is maintained throughout the Triratna Community and that there is a common basis in principles, practices, and institutions deriving from Urgyen Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

#### 4.2.5

##### **Managing meetings:**

To prepare for meetings of the International Council, to guide the meetings, and to ensure its decisions are put into effect.

#### 4.2.6

##### **Urgent Decisions:**

To make urgent decisions on matters affecting the whole Triratna Community. Such decisions should only be made in exceptional cases, when it is not possible to call the International Council together, and after consulting as many International Council members as possible. Decisions made in this way will be submitted for review at the subsequent meeting of the International Council.

### **4.3**

#### **Calling and Frequency of meetings**

##### 4.3.1

##### **Calling of Meetings**

Meetings will be called by the Chair at his/her discretion or at the request of any two members. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that all members can attend each meeting.

##### 4.3.2

##### **Frequency of Meetings**

There will be meetings of the Steering Group at least twice a year and regular contact will be maintained between its members outside meetings.

## **Section 5 / Review and Revision of the Structure**

### **5.1**

#### **Review**

The structure will be reviewed to see whether or not it fulfills the objectives and principles set out above:

- a. *By the International Council* every two years. The Steering Group will make a proposal to the International Council as to how the review is to be conducted.
- b. *By the Order* every six years. The Steering Group will conduct a survey, in which all Order members will be invited to participate, and submit a report to the International Council.

### **5.2**

#### **Revision**

Revision, removal or replacement of all or any provisions of this structure may be proposed by the International Council after consultation with all bodies that might be affected. The proposal will be submitted to the Public Preceptors' College and will become effective once agreed by the College.