



Handbook for members of the European Triratna Chairs Assembly

Produced by the Development Team, last updated January 2023

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1) History of the Triratna Chairs' Assembly

What is now called the "European Triratna Chairs' Assembly" (ECA for short) was originally set up by Bhante as a meeting of "senior and responsible Order members" to further cooperation between different aspects of the movement. It soon developed into a forum for general discussion and developing friendships between those people taking similar responsibilities in the movement.

With the evolution of the movement and the setting up of the presidential system, the Preceptor's College and, more recently the International Council, the nature of the meeting has changed over the years. However it remains the main forum for Centre chairs, and with the formation of the Development Team it is a very effective and influential aspect of the Triratna Community.

Moving on from the idea of "the movement running the movement", the Chairs' Assembly now looks to work more collaboratively with the Preceptors College, International Council, and the Order Convenors.

2) Aims of the Chairs' Assembly

A mission statement:

"The mission of the European Triratna Chairs' Assembly is to help as many people as possible to go for refuge to the Three Jewels on the basis of the practices and principles of the Dharma as elucidated by Sangharakshita.

Our vision is a vibrant and united Triratna Buddhist Community, of Buddhist Centres, groups and other projects, throughout Europe (and beyond).

We will achieve this by generating and supporting new initiatives, encouraging and resourcing excellence and high standards in all activities, promoting and facilitating collaboration and harmony between Triratna Centres, groups and other projects and through providing support, inspiration and friendship for members of the ECA and others taking leading responsibilities."

(a) A network of support and friendship for Triratna Chairs and Directors:

- * The ECA aims to inspire and support members so they can fulfil their responsibility
- * and to provide relevant training and information, especially to new Chairs
- * and to conduct meetings in a spirit of open communication and friendship.
- * Our meetings will have sufficient time for conducting business, but also for developing friendship and for collective spiritual practice.
- * Our main focus is Europe, but we aim to support chairs from beyond Europe too.

(b) Promoting the unity of the Triratna Community in Europe – and beyond:

- * We aim to ensure the Triratna Community is spiritually united – that Triratna activities are based on a deepening understanding of the teachings of Sangharakshita and the traditions of the Triratna Community.
- * The ECA endeavours to maintain an awareness of the Triratna Community as a whole, especially across Europe, in order to ensure harmony.
- * The ECA will maintain dialogue with other key unifying bodies in the Order and movement, especially the Presidents and Mitra Convenors meetings (that, like us, work on behalf of the movement), and also the Preceptors College and Order Convenors.
- * We will also maintain communication and dialogue with Triratna Centres and projects beyond Europe in order to promote the unity and harmony of the whole community.

(c) A vibrant and effective Triratna Community in Europe – and beyond:

- * We aim to help as many people as possible to come into contact with the Triratna Community, so they can encounter an effective path of Dharma practice and vibrant spiritual community.
- * We want to focus on excellence and encourage a high standard in all activities.
- * We aim to generate new initiatives, or encourage those who are generating them.
- * We will research and promote ways in which individual Triratna projects can collaborate, ensuring a more effective use of resources.
- * The ECA will keep members informed of developments across the Triratna Community, including relevant trends and issues that need consideration.
- * We seek, where appropriate, to work with Triratna projects beyond Europe on the above.

3) Chairs' Meetings and Guests and Members of the Chairs Assembly

The Chairs' meetings are the Assembly's principal forum for meeting and discussion. They take place twice a year, in early January and in the summer (about 7 days each).

Most Triratna Centres and projects (with the exception of some of the smaller groups) send a regular representative to the meeting. They comprise the full members of the ECA. We also invite 'guests' on a more one-off basis. This might be someone who is considering becoming the new chair of a local centre, who wants to find out what the chairs meetings are like. (If they later did become the chair of that centre, we would then invite them to be a full member of the meeting.) Every two years, at the summer meeting, usually just before an international convention, Chairs from centres all over the world are invited as guests to the meeting.

4) Joining the Assembly

If someone from a Triratna project would like to join the meeting, they should contact the Development Team who then liaise with the Exec, who are tasked by the whole meeting to decide on new members. The current membership is as shown on the table on pages 8-9.

Over the years guidelines on appointing a Centre Chair have been developed and the latest version can be [found here](#).

There is a [members only group](#) on thebuddhistcentre.com where information and resources for Chairs are posted. On joining the ECA Chairs are added as members to this group.

5) The Executive

The executive (Exec) are also responsible for arranging the Chairs' meeting. If a member of the assembly would like to join the Exec, they can approach any one of them and ask. The Exec will then discuss this with them and, if they would like the person to join, will ask the whole meeting to ratify this at a business meeting. The Exec needs to be large and broad enough to be in touch with all members of the meeting (and to function effectively as an Executive) but not so large that discussion becomes cumbersome. It is recommended that members of the Exec should remain

on the executive for a minimum of 3 years and should ensure they are in a position to attend all meetings of the Exec as well as Chairs' meetings.

The current Exec is: Satyajyoti, Bodhilila, Prasadacarin and Silabodhi. Some members of the Development Team also attend the executive meetings.

The Development Team act as secretary to the meeting and Exec so queries and business can be directed to info@triratnadevelopment.org

The role of the Exec is to:

- * Plan Chairs' meetings with reference to the aims and objects of the Assembly
- * Be responsive to the members of the Assembly
- * Prepare the business of the meeting
- * Ensure the decisions resulting from the meetings are executed
- * Act as a channel for communication with other movement-wide bodies
- * Help maintain continuity between meetings
- * Invite guests and new members to the meeting, and ensure new members are welcomed and inducted into the meeting
- * Deal with necessary business outside the meeting

In addition, since we are a charity (see section 8 below), the Exec members also function as the trustees of that charity.

6) The Triratna Development Team

In 2005 the Chairs' Assembly decided to create a Triratna Development Team. This brought together some already existing posts with some newly created ones. The posts are funded out of dana from Centres. The team works for the Chairs' Assembly and is managed by the Exec. There is a diagram explaining the relationship between the Chairs' Assembly, the executive, and the Development Team on page 7.

Currently, the Development Team comprises:

Aparajita (part-time)	Project worker, admin and Centre support, team leader
Gunabhadri	Project worker, admin and Centre support
Aryaraksita	Racial Diversity Coordinator
Ksantikara	Young People Coordinator
Munisha	Safeguarding, Liaison

7) Business and Decision Making

All business and decision-making at the meeting is agreed by consensus. Sometimes the issues that are involved are complex. There are also quite a large number of people involved in trying to reach decisions. Consequently it is important that business is well organised and well prepared, that those attending the meeting are well briefed on the issues involved and have all the necessary information, and plenty of time to consider matters. It is for these reasons that the following protocol has been established:

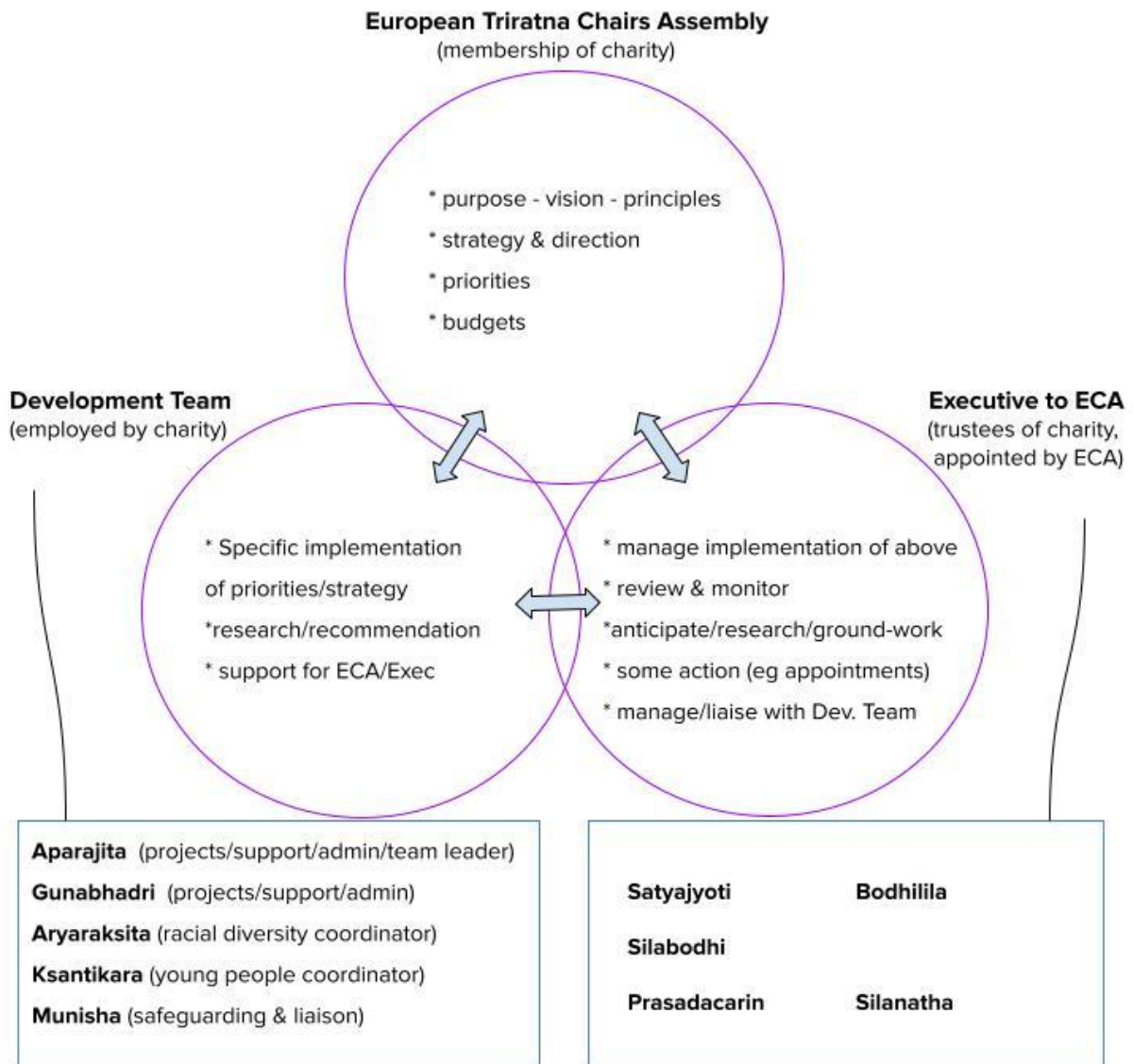
- 1) Ideas and suggestions for the programme of the Chairs' Assembly, or proposals or agenda items for the business meeting, should be sent to the Development Team 6 weeks before the meeting.
- 2) About four weeks before the meeting the Exec meet to plan the meeting and ensure they have the necessary information etc. to be able to proceed effectively.
- 3) The programme and agenda will then be sent out so that everyone has time to read the papers and consider items.
- 4) There is a meeting of the Exec on the day the meeting starts. They can discuss late items of business and decide whether to include them.
- 5) The meeting happens!
- 6) The minutes of the meeting will be sent out by the Development Team no more than four weeks later, to enable action points etc. to be followed up.

8) Triratna Chairs Assembly Charity

In 2006, the Chairs' Assembly constituted itself as a company limited by guarantee and as a registered charity called 'Triratna Chairs Assembly'. This gives the meeting an official/legal structure under which to handle its finances, employ members of the Development Team and so on.

The members of the assembly are the members of the charity, the Exec are the directors of the company and trustees of the charity, and Aparajita is the company secretary. There is a diagram outlining the "structure" – see below.

Structure of ECA / Executive / Development Team



UK URBAN CENTRES		MAINLAND EUROPE	
BIRMINGHAM	Maitrisara	AMSTERDAM	Parina
BRIGHTON	Maitridarshin	ARNHEM	Sangharati (rep)
BRISTOL	Bhadra	ARNSBERG	Bodhimitra
BRIXTON	Viryanaga	BARCELONA	(centre team)
CAMBRIDGE	Keturaja	BERLIN	Aryabandhu
CARDIFF	Kamalagita	CLERMONT-FERRAND	Jayamuni
COLCHESTER	Silanatha	DUBLIN	Sadayasihi
CROYDON	Vajragupta	ESSEN	Dharmadeva
EAST KENT	Prajnasisya	HELSINKI	Suvarnachandra
GLASGOW	Kuladharini/Pasadini	GHENT	Arthakusalin
HIGHLANDS/INVERNESS	Sridakini	ISTANBUL	Vajracaksu (rep)
IPSWICH	Bodhivamsa	KARUNA DEUTSCHLAND	Amoghamati
LEEDS	Nagakusala (rep)	KRAKOW	Padmasiddha
LIVERPOOL	Ksantabandhu (rep)	MOSCOW	Suvarnavira (rep)
LONDON BC	Suryagupta	OSLO	Muditadevi
MANCHESTER	Silabodhi	PARIS	Aryanita
MID-ESSEX	Aryasara	STOCKHOLM	Prasadacarin
NEWCASTLE	Amaradaya	TALLINN (Estonia)	Vaddhaka
NORTH LONDON	Ratnaprabha	VALENCIA	Silamani
NORWICH	Sinhadakini		
NOTTINGHAM	Kusaladevi		
OXFORD	Padmakumara		
SHEFFIELD	Satyajyoti		
SHREWSBURY	Akasharaja		
SOUTHAMPTON	Dhammavijaya		
WEST LONDON	Bodhilila		
YORK	Shakyapada		

RETREAT CENTRES		MOVEMENT-WIDE/ MEDIA	
ADHISTHANA	Khemabandhu	ABHAYARATNA	Mahasraddha
AKASHAVANA	Bodhipaksini	FUTURE DHARMA	Nandavajra
BUDDHAFIELD	Amaragita	KARUNA TRUST	Padmadaka
DHANAKOSA	Nayaka	SIKKHA	Vajrashura
ECODHARMA	Guhyapati	TBCO	Candrasa
GUHYALOKA	Achaladeva	WINDHORSE PUBS	Dhammamegha
ISIPATHANA (Alfoxton)	Jayaraja	WINDHORSE TRUST	Keturaja
METTA VIHARA	Dhammapitika	URGYEN S. TRUST	Prajnaketu
PADMALOKA	Sanghanistha		
RIVENDELL	Tejasiddhi	COLLEGE REPS	
SURYAVANA	Sudaka (rep)	Ratnadarini	Mahamati
TARALOKA	Maitridevi		
TIRATANALOKA	Karunadhi		
VAJRALOKA	Tejananda		

9) The Triratna Development Fund

The Triratna Development Fund is the method by which the ECA collects money and pays for its Development Team and projects they undertake. It also donates some money to other bodies. Those receiving funds in the past have tended to be central, movement-wide institutions and services that have no other obvious source of funding.

The current method for collecting donations from Centres is as follows:

1) Each year Centres are asked to make a pledge for a donation to the Development Fund for the following year. Centres are encouraged to think in terms of pledging up to 5% of their income for the most recent year that figures are available. Income is calculated taking into account all the Centre's income in a given year i.e. from 1st January to 31st December. It includes class income, covenants and gift aid, bookshop

income, rental income etc. Book entries can be excluded i.e. payments that come in and are made straight out again. Special fundraising appeal money can also be excluded.

2) The Development Team contacts Centres in the Autumn asking them to make a pledge for the following year. It is important that they receive details of the pledge in time for budget discussions at an Executive meeting prior to the January ECA meeting.

3) The system relies on centres keeping to these commitments. When your centre agrees to give a donation they are making a firm commitment, only to be broken in dire circumstances!

4) Those who prefer to pay in one lump sum (rather than monthly payments) the Development Team contact in the early part of the year, soon after the January ECA at which the budget for that year was discussed.

How the money is distributed:

1) Applications for funds are sent to the Development Team 6 weeks before the summer chair's meeting - details as to what information to supply in the application can be obtained from them.

2) At the Exec meeting prior to the summer meeting, the Exec preview the requests for funds. They may decide to make a recommendation about funding to the meeting, in order to facilitate a smooth and simpler discussion at the main meeting - the meeting is free to accept, reject, or amend the recommendation.

3) A final decision is made at the summer business meeting and recipients of funds are notified. Towards the end of the year, the bookkeeper will contact you or your centre to ask you to make out a monthly standing order or a one-off payment to the ECA bank account. It is very important that you ensure this happens on time, otherwise those projects receiving grants will find themselves without money that they have been promised by the Chairs' meeting.

10) The International Council

This relatively new structure was created in order to bring together the different geographical/cultural regions of Triratna, and also to bring together the different organisational strands (Order, College, and Movement). It comprises regional meetings of representatives from Order, College, and Movement. Most of the members of those regional meetings then also take part in a two-yearly 'International Council'. It is a structure that will develop and evolve gradually.

The aims of the structure are:

- * 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.

11) The Presidents System

In the early 90's a 'Presidents System' was instigated, as a way of providing Centres, and particularly those taking major responsibility at Centres, with friendship and support from those with most experience, and from someone outside the particular local situation, so that they could remain impartial and retain a perspective.

Many Centres had active Presidents through the 90's - this then went rather fallow but more recently there has been a revival of the Presidents' system. Most Centres do again now have presidents, with a 'new generation' of Order members taking on that role. There is also a once-yearly Presidents Meeting.

There are guidelines for appointing a President which you will [find here](#)

12) Strategic Priorities

Every three or so years the ECA conducts a review of its strategy and priorities. This review informs funding decisions and the work of the Development Team. The last review was done in January 2020. The following were decided as the main priorities of the ECA (in no particular order):

- Young People
- Diversity
- Review of ECA and its relationship with other bodies
- Growth, and contexts for intensity
- Safeguarding
- Dharmic engagement with social & ecological issues
- Training, support, resources for Chairs.

Also the following were considered important and form the wider mandala

- *Money
- *Communications
- Training in path of responsibility
- Deepening pathway for those not pursuing ordination
- *Process of evaluation
- Translations
- *Meditation/Dharma teaching
- *Ethics

(those with * mean other bodies may be taking a lead on them)

13) ECA Membership Guidelines – January 2016

WHY WE NEED MEMBERSHIP GUIDELINES

The ECA has substantial responsibilities including unifying the movement, identifying and tackling current issues and planning the future direction of the movement in Europe. To tackle these effectively we need a membership

- of a manageable size for collective decision making
- with a shared level of experience and responsibility
- and who are continually attending meetings (and therefore able to follow through issues from one meeting to the next)

MEMBERS

The ECA Exec is tasked with considering membership requests and making recommendations for approval by the ECA. They will use the following as guidelines rather than exclusive criteria, so where one of the guidelines is not met they will consider circumstances and 'weigh the balance'. However, most ECA members will be able easily to answer 'yes' to all the guidelines.

Organisational criteria:

Centres or projects that fulfil the following criteria are eligible to send their elected chair:

- Running Buddhist activities including introductory events and events for friends and mitras
- With a 'centre' - a building either owned or permanently rented
- With a legal structure and a council/governing body
- Explicitly/actually a Triratna centre and networked into the wider Triratna Community
- Within Europe

The ECA is keen to have representation from all Centres and the Exec will be proactive in approaching Councils to seek representation.

Triratna groups which cannot fulfil the above criteria will be directed towards the groups support events run by the Development team. Obviously there is a tipping point at which a group is nearing becoming a Centre and this will be taken into account when considering membership applications.

Representatives of Triratna projects with a significant impact in the Triratna Community are also eligible to send their elected chair or, exceptionally, where more appropriate, their executive director. Such projects are expected to fulfil the third and fourth criteria above (viz: have a legal structure and be explicitly Triratna.)

Personal Criteria:

The Chair must be:

- An ordained member of the Triratna Buddhist Order
- Committed to attend ECA meetings in full
- Willing and able to observe and contribute to the aims, objectives and responsibilities of the ECA

- Able to participate in discussions and decision-making
- Willing and able to represent the views of their Centre/project council as well as their personal views

If the Chair fails to attend 3 successive meetings the Exec will communicate with them to clarify and resolve the situation. If necessary their membership will be revoked. Where this happens the Chair is welcome to attend meetings as a guest and can reapply for membership.

GUESTS

Centres /project representatives wishing to attend ECA meetings but not fulfilling the above criteria can apply to attend meeting(s) as a guest. Thus, guests will include:

- Chairs who cannot attend the meeting regularly
- Representatives of Centres and projects which don't have an elected chair at present
- Chairs from outside of Europe
- Public Preceptors and Order Convenors invited as guests

Guests attend meetings as observers and are asked to be sensitive to the greater weight of responsibility carried by full members who will make and implement decisions. Though guests are invited to participate in discussions it is expected that members' voices will predominate.

INDUCTION

Both members and guests are expected to attend an induction session to familiarise themselves with the ECA's aims, objectives, structure and ways of conducting business.