

The ECA January 2015 Meeting: a report by Nandavajra (of the ECA Development Team)

The winter meeting of the Triratna European Chairs Assembly (the 'ECA') took place at Adhithana from 5th to 12th January. Once again the hospitality of the Adhithana community was exemplary. Around 35 UK, Ireland and mainland Europe Chairs were joined by members of the Development Team and, for parts of the meeting, Dhammarati, Paramabandhu, and Ratnadhara, as representatives of the College of Public Preceptors, and Lokeshvara as International Order Convenor. Representatives present from all three 'strands' is fostering a deepening sense of unity and collaboration and, once again, the harmony and effectiveness of the meeting was notable. Before launching in to a full programme of presentations and discussions the assembly had the pleasure of welcoming Jayaraja (Buddhafield) and Arthabandhu (Nottingham) as full members and Rijupatha from TBCO. The following necessarily terse notes summarise the ground covered through the course of the meeting.

As a major topic the meeting returned to a Vision and Strategy (inspired by the Four Verses of acceptance taken at the time of ordination) for the future of the Triratna Community. This has been developed through a collaborative process between the ECA and the Preceptors College and will hopefully inspire and direct our community, in Europe and to some extent beyond, for the next few years and shape a major fundraising campaign. The vision has been expanded into strategic areas and possible projects are beginning to be identified. This is an opportunity to make a real and substantial difference in how our community is resourced and to its ability to 'reach out' to a suffering world and spread the Dharma. The vision and strategy document can be viewed at the ECA page at TBCO.

Based on his experience at the LBC Jnanavaca gave a talk on creating a culture of Triratna Centres. Through discussion, issues and topics to explore at future ECA meetings were identified including possible ethical guidelines for Centre, the place of secular mindfulness teaching, sustainable economics for our Centres and community, attracting more men to the Dharma and teaching at Centres.

Dhammarati, with the help of Jnanacandra, outlined a proposal on Commonality, the integration of new practices and the Direct Pointing pilot project arising out of discussions at the International Council and the College of Public Preceptors. Details can be found at the International Council page at TBCO.

Amalavajra reported on the success of recent major gift campaign to raise £50,000 to supplement the 2015 ECA Development Fund, citing the importance of motivational stories such as the 17 year old Mexican woman who discovered the Clear Vision website and was so grateful for the way in which it transformed her life. Amalavajra also spoke about his 'Money Awakening' initiative to promote a culture change around money where how we use our money is regarded as a spiritual practice. Recent articles in Shabda explore his vision and ideas.

Every so often the ECA asks 'what is the purpose of its gatherings – why spend so much time in meetings?' and Mokshini and Amoghavajra led an exploration of this topic and noted the importance of regular representation from Centres. Mokshini also updated the assembly on Buddhist Action Month for June 2015. This is building on the success of BAM in 2014 and includes a broader 'menu' of possible actions. Resources will become available from March and hosted on TBCO and a number of local 'champions' have been gathered to inspire events at local Centres.

Singhamati gave a presentation on her work as Young Buddhist Co-ordinator and developments in events and activities for young Buddhists. Candradasa and Rijupatha updated the meeting on TBCO and plans for its development, inviting feedback on the website which they will feed into a forthcoming review and redesign of the site. Vajragupta arose from his sick bed to present exciting plans and ideas for the future of Adhithana including the possible building of more accommodation to increase capacity on the site of the barn. He also presented ideas on the development of the teaching and training programme at Adhithana.

Srivati visited the meeting to share her inspiration and experience of teaching mindfulness and meditation in schools and a number of helpful links to resources are available through contacting Nandavajra.

Keturaja informed the meeting that the conclusion had been reached that Windhorse:evolution should cease trading and that the business will close over the next few months. Keturaja outlined some of the impacts on the movement of W: E's closure and issues that will need to be addressed in the future. Members of the meeting rejoiced at some length in W:E as a project and in Keturaja for all his dedication and hard work over the years as well as in his many admirable qualities.

An enduring feature of the meeting is the opportunity for members to share their joys, inspirations and challenges in small groups, to participate and form 'special interest' groups, to meditate together and to enjoy presentations on particular Centres. At this meeting it was the turn of Arthakusalin who gave a charming and inspiring presentation on activities in Ghent and Brussels.

At the concluding evening the meeting bade farewell to Sradhamani, who is stepping down as Chair of Newcastle Buddhist Centre, and Dhammadassin, who is stepping down as a member of the Development Team. Both were rejoiced in at some length and thanked for their dedication to their respective roles and their contributions to the ECA meeting. The evening concluded with cultural offerings from members of the meeting including madrigals, poems, the trick of climbing through a postcard and an example of German humour (I'll leave you guessing!).

The Vision and strategy and minutes of the formal meetings can be viewed at the ECA page at thebuddhistcentre.com. If you would like any further information please contact Nandavajra at nandavajra@triratnadevelopment.org