

Annual report to the Annual General Meeting of

**THE NETWORK OF BUDDHIST
ORGANISATIONS
April 5th 2008**

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Report from the Chair

I have just returned from our first Convivium which was held at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. This is an event that has been some years in the thinking and planning and I was very pleased and honoured to be part of it. I should explain a little further. We had the idea some time ago to bring together Buddhist teachers who have been in British Buddhism for many years. It was really to make a space available for them to share some time together out of their busy schedules, to get to know each other a little better and to share Dharma. There was no set agenda or particular plans. It was offered as a space for free exchange, and that is what happened. As it turned out it was a relatively small gathering but none the less valuable for that. It was a delightful couple of days, and from the perspective of the organising group, well enjoyed by those who attended. I am sure also that it will serve to continue and improve good relations between the various Buddhist groups in the UK. I very much hope that we will repeat it every few years.

In September we ran a day event entitled 'Eco-Dharma- the Way It Is'. This was not particularly well attended, which was a shame as the talks were interesting and enlightening. Some of the information which was imparted was quite surprising and I am sure many would have been intrigued. We will no doubt continue to do these kind of events from time to time but we are going to look into supporting more localised events along the lines of the Manchester Inter-Buddhist Conference which took place in the Summer of 2007. This was not an NBO event, though we did support, it but rather an event organised by Buddhists in Manchester. I was unable to attend but all reports that have come back to me have been positive. These types of events I believe are very valuable and important for the healthy growth of the Buddhist world in the UK. If others are organising such events please do let us know as we would love to attend and support in some way.

We have been members of the European Buddhist Union for some years and continue with that. As Chair of the NBO I have been attending these meetings and indeed the UK presence is very noticeable. I think it is very important to have Buddhist voices at European level and it is clear that within the European Parliament and Union very little is known or understood about Buddhism. There are plans to make closer connections with European and international institutions.

I am very pleased and happy with the way things are within the NBO. However we are always open to new and fresh input from people so please do feel free to come along to our meetings and get involved. We have a very hard working and dedicated activities committee and enthusiastic representatives from the member organisations. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have put so much time and effort into the NBO over the past year.

Jamie Cresswell. Chair

Secretary's Report

Before writing this report I glanced back at what I had to say last year to see if anything had substantially changed. In some ways very little has changed which I think is no bad thing. We continue to provide a service to the Buddhist community and we do indeed work with "like-minded organisations" as our Constitution allows. What is however changing is the way in which we work because clearly some things have greater appeal than others and it is important that we put our effort into the things that work.

For the most part, apart from the AGM, meetings are not particularly well attended. We thought that by moving them to different parts of the country we would make it easy for people to get together to discuss topics of mutual interest but the reality is that very few people turn up at these events although I often have a lot of apologies from people who say that they would be interested but are otherwise engaged or are simply just too busy. The meeting on the Environment last September in Birmingham was a good case in point. The speakers and committee almost outnumbered the audience and although those who were present were very impressed by the quality of the presentations it is hard to justify that much work if people are too busy to attend. We are therefore hoping that in future we can support regional meetings which have local ownership and which people may feel are more relevant to their immediate needs.

One long-term dream has recently been fulfilled in that we held a Convivium, by kind invitation of Rev Master Daishin Morgan at Throssel Hole Priory. The principal teachers of five different traditions met together for two nights and the intervening day which gave time for serious discussion as well as some light-hearted conviviality, a tour of the Priory, and meditation and participation in the ceremonies of the resident monks. As an observer and facilitator, I was interested to see the extent to which those present began to develop a fuller understanding of each other's traditions. The depth of the differences between traditions was fully acknowledged, but so too was much common ground and our efforts to bring people together seems to have been appreciated. We hope to plan a similar event at some point in the future.

Now that a number of us have been working for the NBO for some years it is particularly important that people do not get the feeling that there is a "closed shop" of people who get on and do the work. Committee meetings are open to any Associate member or representative of a member organisation and the minutes of all meetings are in the password protected area of the website. If you do not know the passwords, please contact Wilson Young, our Webmaster, and he will supply them. The NBO is an entirely open organisation, by which I mean that it is open to scrutiny, open to suggestions and open to anyone who agrees to the terms of our Constitution. Anybody is welcome to join in at whatever level they feel able to. Do come and join us.

Information Officer's Report

The job of Information Officer is now twofold. It began as being the Web Master's errand boy, formatting items for the Events page and researching and writing up items on the News page. As a result I get a lot of lucrative financial offers from West Africa and last year joined our Membership Secretary in creating Buddhist history ourselves.

The other function is to provide details about Buddhism in various formats for outside agencies who request it. Last year I was able to correct a Home Office guide to faiths and to make a Power Point presentation on Buddhist Diversity to the Cohesion & Faiths Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Coming under this head too is replying to consultations in various formats asking the Buddhist view on a variety of topics. Earlier this year I got another agency for which I work to send me on a training day on how to do this more effectively. NBO has procedures for consulting its membership and the wider Buddhist community when necessary which, considering how diverse we all are, has sometimes produced remarkable unanimity...but not always, as the request for a statement on our views concerning the storage and threat to use nuclear weapons showed only too clearly!

One of the main reasons why consultations come my way is because of my presence on the Government's faith think-tank, the Faith Communities Consultative Council. Just lately the Equality & Human Rights Commission (which is independent of Government) has shown an interest in consulting NBO in its work, a development which we welcome.

Interfaith Co-ordinator's Report

Interfaith dialogue has been a personal interest of mine for decades, but that is not necessarily a requirement for this job. As the leading Buddhist umbrella group, NBO is in membership of the Inter Faith Network UK and the Co-ordinator is generally elected onto IFN's Executive (along with a member of the Theravadin Sangha), which meets four times a year. This in turn entails membership of the Network's Faith Communities Forum, which meets twice yearly, and invitations to a variety of meetings with a special focus. Last year I attended one where members of the various faiths with an interfaith brief conferred together.

Another result of our IFN connection was that I took over Phil Henry's place on the Religion & Belief Consultation Group, which has a special interest in Government legislation affecting faiths and beliefs, in particular the various stages of the Equalities Act. This has led in turn to its liaison with the ministerial transition team setting up the Equality & Human Rights Commission and its recent application to become the Commission's consultancy body on matters affecting its strand. I have

helped draw up one of the documents connected with this and have also acted as minute-taker in the occasional absence of our regular secretary.

A particular initiative in which Buddhists have participated during the last two years is the creation of a forum of Dharmic faiths (Buddhists, Jains, Hindus and Sikhs) of Indian origin. The term has started to be used in Government and IFN circles and talks are continuing.

Treasurer's Report March 2008
(See attached financial statement)

The NBO remains financially stable. The set of accounts for this year have been prepared on a Receipts and Payments basis with a Statement of Assets and Liabilities and have been Independently Examined. The examiners statement will be available at the AGM.

The accounts are broken down into restricted and unrestricted funds. The restricted funds consist of the grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund and its expenditure up to 31st March 2007. The grant funded a development worker for the NBO and is now fully spent. The unrestricted funds consist of the usual NBO income and expenses. Membership income is down and expenses apparently higher compared to the same period last year (January to December 2006), hence the £669 deficit. This is due to an increase in travel expenditure of £280 and a contribution of £1000 to the Inter Faith Network (IFN) of £500 for both 2006 and 2007. If this is fully taken into account the NBO has actually been running for both years (2006 & 2007) with a small deficit of about £200. The NBO has reserves and so held a total of £5510 in unrestricted funds at 31st December 2007.

Our running expenses continue to remain modest, as we continue to take advantage of some member organisations offerings of facilities at cost, as well as using e-groups on the internet for communication. The Independent Examination of the accounts this year was offered for free. The secretary has broadband access and the NBO benefits from the free use of the phone so general expenses do continue to remain artificially low.

NBO Education Advisory Group (EAG) report 2007-8

Kevin Fossey and Munisha represented the NBO for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's review of the KS3 (lower secondary) Religious Education curriculum in England and Wales, now complete. They have just agreed to continue this representation on the QCA review of the KS1 (lower primary) curriculum.

Last year, the NBO joined the Religious Education Council, which oversees the development of RE in schools in England and Wales. As last year we have not yet had delegates to attend their meetings, and Munisha has still not found time to attend as a Clear Vision rep.

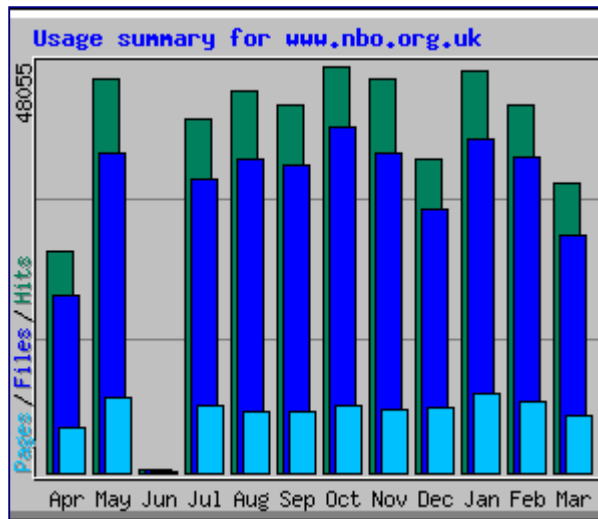
Munisha has remained contact for the EAG. Outside requests for help from Buddhists seem to have declined, including requests for help in finding SACRE reps. This may be a result of Mariano's work co-ordinating Buddhists in the south east, or of Yann's no longer being on the committee of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), though he was not the Buddhist rep.

The EAG has continued to be responsive rather than taking initiative. Munisha does not have time for more than this, so the way is still open for consideration of an NBO education officer: someone with experience in the RE world and time to attend meetings of QCA and the REC etc, who might be co-opted to NASACRE, as well as convening of the EAG in a more active way.

Munisha, EAG Contact

Website Report ~ April 2008

Visitor Statistics: the site continues to be well visited as show in the chart below. The average of around 48,000 hits/month is rather misleading, as *one* visit to a site that contains *N* images (throughout the whole site) will count as *N hits*. However, given the paucity of images on our site (see below), we do have a fairly healthy and reasonably consistent number of people looking at the site.



I have no idea what happened in June 2007 ~ I'm not aware that the site was ever off-line, nor was there any other reason I can think of.

Navigating around the site: at Sally's suggestion I have put copies of the navigation buttons on the Home Page, with a description of what can found on the various pages. I hope this assists visitors to find their way around.

Site Content: it has been suggested that the site is 'rather wordy' with too few images. For much of the site images are inappropriate ~ for those pages where images might be useful (eg the Events page, News page etc), I can only put images on the page *if people send them to me*.

If you have any material you would like to be put on the site, and have relevant photographs, do please let me have them. If you don't know how to re-size pictures, just send them to me as they come off your camera and I will process them.

Remember the NBO website is *your* website ~ one of the benefits of membership is that you can advertise your forthcoming events, and give accounts of previous events on the various pages of the website.

We have recently added an 'Environment' page. At present it only has links to a number of relevant external sites, but if you would like to make a contribution to this important topic, please send your copy to me. (we cannot *guarantee* inclusion of any material sent)

Email Groups: The Yahoo Information Group has got very out of date, in that there are still people on it who are no longer members, conversely there are current members who are *not* on it.

We decided to have a fresh start, and have formed a Google group which now has 56 members. There are still one or two people for whom we have no email address. If *you know* that your organization is a paid up member of the NBO and your representative hasn't received any Information Group emails, please get in touch with me.

The group is a 'read-only' group, so if you want to send a message out to all NBO members via the group, you will need to send it to either Sally or myself for forwarding.

The old Yahoo group is still running, and the archive of past messages is still available, but we will soon be deleting the group.

If you have any queries about, or material for the website, or if you have any problems with the Information Group, please write to me.

Wilson Young
Webmaster
22nd March 2008

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