

## Regional Centre of Expertise in ESDGC in Wales:

### RCE Wales Briefing Paper 1

#### What is an RCE?

Currently, there are 62 Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) around the world (4 in the UK), recognised by the UN University (UNU) as part of UN activity to promote and develop ESDGC in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> (DESD, 2005-2014). You can find out more about RCEs at [http://www.ias.unu.edu/sub\\_page.aspx?catID=108&ddlID=183](http://www.ias.unu.edu/sub_page.aspx?catID=108&ddlID=183)

#### What's happening in Wales?

From the beginning, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, UNESCO Cymru and the Welsh Assembly Government, along with many amongst you, have been active and keen to work with partners to establish an effective RCE in Wales.

To date, there are no RCEs in Wales, despite the high level of activity and expertise we have in the field, and formal recognition of the vital importance of this work by the Welsh Assembly Government and other national and local organisations. Against this background, a series of consultation events were held in Wales in 2008, to seek the views and ideas of those active in the ESDGC field, to gauge the level of interest in, and ideas for, establishing an RCE in Wales. The response was an unequivocal: 'Let's do it!'

Recognising that a) Wales can boast a range of ongoing co-ordinated ESDGC activity (and much unco-ordinated); b) we inhabit a small country (RCE 'Region'); c) no UN or other funds attach directly to RCE recognition or activity and d) that, across the world, the RCE fraternity is variously fostered, led, driven, invigorated or otherwise supported, by Universities and other Higher Education and Research establishments, the enthusiastic feedback from the consultations has led to the following principles being incorporated into the design of our proposed (Candidate) RCE Wales:

- a) No duplication of effort with existing activity – the RCE must be designed to complement and enhance existing ESDGC activity
- b) One Wales : One RCE – Wales is small enough to enjoy the luxury of having just one country-wide RCE
- c) The application for, and establishment of, an RCE will require the diversion of existing resources
- d) In common with other RCEs, HEIs might be considered as the organisations best placed to facilitate RCE establishment and provide ongoing operational support for RCE activity.

#### What progress so far?

In line with these principles, **Swansea University and the University of Wales, Newport, responded to an open invitation from the Welsh Assembly Government to take the lead in preparing the Wales RCE application documentation. With the support of the Assembly and HEFCW, an Interim Steering Group has been convened to guide and assist Swansea and Newport in preparing the application. Interim Steering Group members<sup>2</sup>, importantly, bring a range of perspectives and experience to the preparatory discussions, thus ensuring that the RCE Wales is**

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<sup>1</sup> In Wales, we use the acronym 'ESDGC' (Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship) in place of the more usual 'ESD'.

<sup>2</sup> FE (Welsh College of Horticulture), HE (HEFCW, Swansea University and University of Wales, Newport), (HE ESDGC and Estates), Local Authorities (WLGA), NGO (Centre for Alternative Technology, Cynnal Cymru, Keep Wales Tidy, RSPB), UNESCO (UNESCO Cymru), WAG (DCELLS SU ESDGC).

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**configured to be as relevant and fit-for-purpose as possible.** Once the RCE is established, the composition of the Interim Steering Group will be reviewed at intervals to ensure its relevance and effectiveness are maintained.

**The Interim Steering Group has met twice, to provide detailed comment and steer in relation to the application documentation being prepared.** Draft application documents are at different stages of completion, their content drawn from ESDGC, RCE and other relevant consultations, in accordance with UNU guidance. **The drafts are finessed by the Interim Steering Group, with specific advice from established RCE stakeholders and any necessary others (for example, in drafting partnership agreements).** Final application texts are being produced by Swansea University, assisted by the University of Wales, Newport.

#### **But what will it *do*; what will it look like?**

Around the world, Higher Education and Research Institutes lead and facilitate RCEs. Around the world, and in Wales, this does not translate simply into ESDGC *about* HEIs, *by* HEIs and *for* HEIs. Our RCE will be fully inclusive, our stakeholders including educators, researchers, community groups, local government officers, volunteers, business and the media; indeed everyone who cares about building a sustainable future for Wales through education.

In seeking to avoid duplication, a critical gap has been identified from the consultation events: that of research and development of ESDGC itself. It has been decided, therefore, that the unique characteristic and focus of the RCE will be its research and development function. As such, the RCE can support the range of stakeholders. Its role will be to challenge us all, in whichever sector we operate, and with whatever focus, to 'raise the bar' in terms of the quality and impact of our ESDGC provision. It must challenge us to work out responses to questions such as, 'How can we improve our ESDGC practice?', 'What constitutes *quality* ESDGC in our area of work?', 'How will we measure improvement or impact?' More specifically, the RCE will challenge us all to integrate reflective learning and include an element of ESDGC research in our projects, and ensure that the RCE collective learns from our efforts.

HEIs will play a key role in achieving such aims, bringing their research know-how to work in project partnerships with stakeholders, to support improvement of the quality of ESDGC provision in Wales, providing both direct and indirect support to constituencies sharing that aim.

A Secretariat will be established to co-ordinate and administrate the RCE.

#### **What next?**

We will keep all stakeholders updated with significant progress during the application stage, and of course will relay the application result (anticipated in the autumn of 2009).

In the next few days we will distribute a second RCE Briefing Paper, to bring you up to date with the vision, objectives, and other framework concepts that are now in place, which will guide our work when RCE Wales gains UNU recognition.

If you have not received this Briefing Paper from us directly, and wish to be included on the circulation list, please contact us at [rcewales@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:rcewales@swansea.ac.uk), and give us your contact details. Of course, you are also welcome to relay any questions or comments you may have, at any time. Thank you. We look forward to hearing from you and to working with you.