



**Irish Application to become a
Regional Centre of Expertise in
Education for Sustainable Development
(I-RCE-ESD)**

**Summary Document – Revised to address comments from the
Global RCE Service Centre**

Ubuntu Network: Teacher Education for Sustainable
Development,
DICE Project: Development and Intercultural Education
and Partners

20th July 2007

1. Introduction

In the period from 1990 to 2000 Ireland underwent an economic boom that transformed it from a nation of high unemployment and emigration to one of vibrant economic success and progress. The subsequent National Development Plan (2000 – 2006) built upon this success and invested €54 billion to further improve infrastructure, employment, knowledge creation and industry. As Ireland enters into a new phase of development from 2007 to 2013, it continues to plan for an internationally competitive future that is economically viable but that is also socially desirable and environmentally sustainable.

To achieve this Ireland needs a collaborative and far-reaching initiative that propels Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into all aspects of education (formal, non-formal and informal) and that promotes a multidisciplinary approach to raising awareness and achieving positive change. This application presents a vision for an Irish RCE (I-RCE).

The I-RCE will promote ESD that develops:

- **Knowledge and Understanding** of national and international challenges - the causes, the impact, the interdependence and the potential solutions,
- **Skills** required to process the information, critically think about it and debate the issues, communicate views, self-reflect, and make informed decisions,
- **Attitudes** of local and global responsibility and solidarity with those experiencing inequality and injustice

The I-RCE will promote a sustainable development message that is strong, consistent and unequivocal. All educators in Ireland - including teachers, media, parents, church, industry, development organisations, researchers, museums and community groups – will play a role.

2. Ireland - Geographical scope and Major Characteristics

Ireland is located in the Atlantic Ocean to the North West of continental Europe. It is divided into two states - Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (or simply Ireland). Ireland has a landmass of 70,280 sq km and a population of 4.2 million. The capital city, Dublin, has a population of over 1 million. The main language is English.

Ireland has a mild and equable climate. Its exposure to the Atlantic Ocean and its long coastline mean that it has high wave and wind energy potential. Inland, farm holdings and enclosed fields dominate the Irish landscape. It is a relatively flat country however some areas have distinctive patterns of low-lying hills called drumlins. Approximately 8% of the land is covered by forestry. Numerous rivers, the largest of which is the River Shannon, drain the lowlands. It is estimated that one sixth of the land is covered in bog.



The Irish demographic profile shows a large youth population with 35.3% under the age of 24, and a growing elderly population with 11.1% aged 65 years or over. Life expectancy is 77.9 years, (for men 75.27 years and for women 80.7 years).

3a. Regional Sustainable Development Challenges in Ireland

Ireland faces a number of sustainable development challenges as outlined here

Sustainable Development Challenges - Environmental

- *Energy Dependence:* Ireland is highly reliant on fossil fuels for the production of energy. Renewable energy sources provide only 8% of Irish electricity needs.
- *Emission of Greenhouse Gases:* Under the Kyoto Protocol, Ireland committed to limiting the growth of annual emissions to 13% above 1990 levels. It has failed to reach these targets and Ireland is now in the top five nations in per capita greenhouse gas emissions.
- *Waste:* Production of waste has increased dramatically in Ireland over the past decade. In 2003, over 3 million tonnes of municipal waste was generated from households, industry and street; 28% of this waste was recycled but the remainder was dumped in landfill sites.
- *Water:* Eutrophication in inland freshwaters has been identified as Ireland's most serious pollution problem. It is estimated that 30% of Irish rivers and 15% of Irish lakes are polluted. Ireland's capacity to provide water for consumption in the future is questionable.
- *Loss of Biodiversity:* Over 1,000 kilometres of hedgerows were lost between 1997 and 1999, peat bog decreased by 8 per cent between 1990 and 2000, 18 bird species are in serious decline, 35 of the 56 fish stocks fished in Irish waters are in decline.
- *Global Dimensions of the Local Challenges.* Ireland's environmental challenges need to be understood in the context of their impact on a global level, the most significant challenge of which is climate change and its effect on livelihoods, health and land use.

Sustainable Development Challenges - Social

- *Poverty:* Despite Ireland's economic success, almost one in five Irish people (19.4 %) live below the income poverty threshold (2004 statistics).
- *Visible Minorities and Cultural Diversity:* Ireland society has diversified in recent years with a broad mix of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Integration of diversity into society remains a challenge.
- *Education Disadvantage:* In some regions, low participation and achievement in the formal education system are experienced as a result of poor socio-economic background.
- *Quality of Life:* As a result of Ireland's economic success, issues such as high rates of borrowing, long working hours, costly childcare, and long commuter times are emerging.

Sustainable Development Challenges - Economic

- *Maintaining Competitiveness:* Ireland's competitiveness in international manufacturing markets is declining as a result of increased labour costs, production overheads and inflation as well as competition from many parts of China, India, South East Asia etc.
- *Reliance on the Construction Industry:* At the end of 2005, over 13 % of Ireland's employment was accounted for by the construction sector – such dependency on a single sector raises concern.
- *Knowledge-based Economy:* In accordance with the EU Lisbon Strategy there is a clearly identified national need to develop a self-sustaining knowledge-based economy in Ireland. This places an emphasis on developing human capital within research and development and the growing need for flexible individuals skilled in the creation and use of knowledge.
- *Global Inequality.* There are two challenges for Ireland here. One is to create greater public engagement with Ireland's Overseas Development Aid programme, and secondly to encourage the development of critical awareness of patterns of trade and consumption which contribute to inequalities.

3b. Challenges to Integrating ESD into Education in Ireland

Many of the issues mentioned above in 3a. are complex – some are interrelated, others are contradictory; the causes, consequences and solutions to them are often debated.

The I-RCE applicants appreciate that the process of educating to address these regional issues is a long and intricate one, and one that requires significant investment in the education system. The I-RCE has devised the following list of challenges associated with integrating ESD into education in Ireland. It is from this list that the I-RCE will structure its workplans.

- Positioning ESD within the established adjectival educations (including Human Rights Education, Development Education, Intercultural Education, Citizenship Education and Environmental Education) and thus ensuring a collaborative approach to educating for sustainable development.
- Developing the capacity of educators within the formal, non-formal and informal sectors to examine their own professional practice and to engage with and integrate ESD principles and practices.
- Integrating ESD into Initial Teacher Education policy, programmes and practices and thus engaging student teachers as advocates of the ESD.
- Providing ESD as part of Continual Professional Development for the 53,000 primary and post primary teachers in Ireland.
- Ensuring that ESD is recognised as a component of the educational process associated with trades and crafts – particularly construction and the service industries.
- Supporting learners (in all education sectors) to developing the ESD skills of critical awareness and systemic thinking so that may engage with the issues and make decisions that lead to sustainable living.
- Embedding Sustainable Development into the already overloaded formal education curricula (primary, post primary and third level).
- Establishing a clear means by which ESD can be assessed and recorded in formal and non formal education.
- Linking Local and Global Sustainable Development in formal, non formal and informal education.

4. Process of RCE Development and Key Institutions involved

In October 2004 Dr. Roland Tormey (Ubuntu Network and University of Limerick) attended the conference of the *European Association of Distance Teaching Universities* in Heerlen, The Netherlands and was particularly struck by Hans van Ginkel's presentation on the RCE concept. At this time, the RCE concept fitted the evolving model of the Ubuntu Network, however the Ubuntu Network, which was then in its first year, did not have the capacity to consider an application.

In the time period from March 2006 to March 2007 a number of face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations took place between members of the Ubuntu Network and Prof. Charles Hopkins on the subject of RCE development.

In the period from January 2007 to June 2007 the application planning process was advanced through dialogue at Ubuntu Network Steering Committee meetings, meetings with partner NGOs, Comhar, Cultivate and the NCCA, presentations and support from Prof. Hopkins, and conversations with Adam Cade (Director RCE East Midlands) and Yoko Mocizuk (UNU).

In June 2007 Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) were drawn up between the University of Limerick and participant Third Level Education Institutions. Letters of Support were received from partners. The application was submitted on 22nd June 2007.

Key institutions involved in the I-RCE application are: **Third Level – Post Primary Teacher Education:** Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT), Mater Dei Institute of Education, National College of Art and Design (NCAD), National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM), St. Angela’s College of Education Sligo, Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Cork (UCC), University College Dublin (UCD), University of Limerick (UL); **Third Level –Primary Teacher Education:** Mary Immaculate College, DICE (Development and Intercultural Education); National Centre for Global Development through Education at Mary Immaculate College; **Post Primary Education:** National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCA), CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, Presentation Convent Portlaoise; **NGOs:** Cultivate, Amnesty International, Trócaire, ECO-UNESCO, Just Forests (represent EENGO); **Government Advisory:** Comhar (National Sustainable Development Council)

5. RCE Vision and Objectives

The I-RCE applicants will focus on the challenges associated with integrating ESD into the **Irish education sector**. It will develop a regional learning space for ESD in education, thereby ensuring that ESD becomes a central part of education in Ireland. It will work to:

- **Raise Awareness** of the importance of ESD across all aspects of education and promote a disposition of engagement with the issues, thus building towards greater public awareness through the dissemination of research and activities.
- **Provide a Supportive Network for ESD** by building a virtual and face-to-face collaborative environment across formal, informal and non-formal education in which those involved in education can share methodologies, experiences and vision for ESD.
- **Engage in Capacity Building** by building ESD knowledge, skills and values among educators through learning events (e.g. workshops, forums, debates, projects, exchanges), resource development and social learning (e.g. through informal discussion and meetings).
- **Support Action Research Projects** by helping educators to integrate ESD into their professional practice by planning, implementing and evaluating the outcomes of individual and collaborative ESD action research projects.

6. Governance/Management Structure of the RCE

The I-RCE will have a Governance Committee made up of representative members. Where relevant, subcommittees will be set up to take responsibility for specific tasks e.g. Public Relations, Finance. The Governance Committee will

- Promote the I-RCE within their own fields of expertise,
- Oversee the operation of the I-RCE to ensure that objectives are met
- Review strategic plans for research projects that address the regional ESD challenges,
- Identifying funding opportunities to ensure that projects are viable,
- Ensure that project processes and outcomes are documented and distributed as relevant to build greater public awareness.

The Committee will meet a minimum of 3 times each year in a central location. The position of Chairperson will rotate between meetings to promote shared responsibility and ownership.

The I-RCE will have a Secretariat (initially made up of Ubuntu Network and DICE staff in phase 1 and a dedicated person in phase 2 – subject to approval of funders). Information on the I-RCE members, their activities and outputs will be centralised on the I-RCE website. I-RCE members will form Thematic Working Groups to devise research projects and activities that address the

specified ESD challenges. Funding to support this work will be sought from a variety of relevant sources including Irish Aid (Department of Foreign Affairs), Higher Education Authority (Department of Education and Science) and INTERREG IV (EU Operational Programme 2007 - 2013), and EDU Link (ACP-EU Cooperation Programme in Higher Education).

7. Collaboration among Stakeholders

The I-RCE will be made up of individuals, organisations and institutions involved in formal, informal and non-formal education (see section 4) and with a commitment for integrating ESD into educational practice, policy and programmes.

Existing members of the I-RCE include primary and post-primary teacher education colleges and universities, teachers, environmental and developmental NGOs, education officers and practitioners within the informal sector, DE/ESD education networks, researchers, educational policy makers, statutory agencies for curriculum development and the national sustainable development council. Further members to be engaged in the I-RCE include media organisations and colleges, parent's organisations, church and faith based groups, development organisations, museums and community groups.

Collaboration will take place on a number of levels including:

1. *Governance Committee* – active member organisations will nominate representatives to sit on the I-RCE Governance Committee where matters relating to ESD in education will be discussed and decisions regarding the I-RCE will be collectively made.
2. *Collaborative Action Research Projects* – participants will be encouraged to partake in working groups that focus on action research projects relating to the educational regional challenges as specified by the I-RCE (See Section 3b).
3. *Capacity Building Activities* – events will be organised by I-RCE members. These will include formal seminars with keynote speakers and less formal information sharing events. Innovative methods of collaboration and sharing will be advocated.
4. *Communication* – a virtual learning space will be maintained through the I-RCE website, online forum, email and other relevant technologies. Opportunities for face-to-face exchanges will be part of the modus operandi of the RCE.
5. *Interaction beyond the RCE* – it is envisaged that links will be made with partner RCEs through meetings such as the International RCE conference in Penang, in August 2007, and at the RCE East Midlands Inaugural Conference on ESD and Citizenship at regional level (September 20th in Loughborough University).
6. *Links with partners in the Global South will be fostered* - these will be built from existing relationships that exist between I-RCE members and educational institutions in countries such as Rwanda, Zambia, Lesotho and Kenya.

8. Short and Long Term Resource Arrangements

During I-RCE Phase 1 members of the Ubuntu Network, DICE Project and I-RCE partners will provide resource support where activities complement their exiting agendas. In particular (with the approval or funders), administrative and secretariat hours will be forthcoming. This is seen as a preliminary measure to ensure the setting up of such a network is sufficiently administrated. Beyond Phase 1, future funding applications submitted by the Ubuntu Network and DICE Project will include resource allocations for RCE activities. Specific funding will be sought from a relevant source to put in place a dedicated part time secretariat (0.5 person). Research projects undertaken by working groups will also seek funding from relevant sources (as indicated in Section 6).

9. On-going and Planned Activities

I-RCE member applicants are involved in integrating ESD concepts and principles into education in Ireland. In forming the I-RCE, planned activities for **phase 1 (August 2007 – August 2008)** will concentrate on:

1. Sharing the vision of the I-RCE, increasing active participation in it and developing an ESD interface that supports collaboration and sharing of ESD methodologies, approaches, research, lessons learned and learning tools etc. that are appropriate to the Irish context.

Planned activities include:

- Consulting with those interested in becoming active members of the I-RCE. Promoting the I-RCE vision to a wider audience. (**Continuously throughout Aug '07 – Aug '08**).
- Developing a temporary I-RCE website and online forum. (**Oct 2007**)
- Setting up the I-RCE Governance Committee and secretariat. (**Sept '07 - Nov '07**)
- Running a series of events and information sessions that build the capacity of educators to engage with ESD issues. (**Jan '08 – May '08**)
- Running a national ESD event to mark the launch of I-RCE. (**Aug '08**)

2. Formulating clear workplans to facilitate action research on the challenges to integrating ESD into education in Ireland. In doing this the I-RCE will

- Develop an interface whereby ESD practitioners can collectively engage in the planning of research and activities. (**Dec '07 - Jan '08**)
- Formulate workplans for research projects that address some of the regional challenges to integrating ESD into education. (**Jan '08 – Aug '08**)

Phase 2 (August 2008 – August 2011) will concentrate on:

1. Building upon the collaborative nature of the I-RCE both nationally and internationally. In particular the I-RCE will seek to:

- Continue to facilitate dialogue and interaction on the regional challenges to ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education with relevant stakeholders.
- Continue to promote the vision and practice of the I-RCE.
- Create a dynamic and dedicated I-RCE website and online forum.
- Engage in dialogue and exchange programmes with formal and non-formal education institutions in a global South partner country (e.g. Rwanda, Lesotho, Zambia or Kenya) to understand regional challenges and to investigate the potential to form a partner RCE.
- Ensure a dedicated Secretariat is put in place.

2. Planning, implementing and evaluating more action research projects that address the challenges to ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education. In doing this, the I-RCE will:

- Continue the research projects commenced in Phase 1.
- Develop further detailed workplans and impact assessments for projects that address the remaining regional challenges to integrating ESD into education.
- Identify resources (financial and human) necessary to implement, evaluate and disseminate the outputs of projects.

Phase 3 (August 2011 – August 2014) will identify long term, sustainable initiatives to further integrate ESD into education and build greater public awareness in Ireland.

10. Contact Information

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