RCE SEVERN
UNU Regional Centre of Expertise in Sustainability Education
Promoting transformational learning and change in the West Midlands and South West
WHO WE ARE
RCe Severn is a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) in Education for Sustainable Development. The Centre is endorsed by the United Nations University and is one of 55 similar centres throughout the world. RCE Severn is co-ordinated by the University of Gloucestershire.

Mission of RCE Severn
RCE Severn exists to work with partners to develop and implement innovative projects and programmes in sustainability education. It aims to do this by bringing together a wide range of organisations from different sectors, which have diverse skills and experiences of delivering sustainability education to a broad range of audiences. The premise behind the work of RCE Severn is that partners can learn from each other as they engage in sustainability education projects and programmes, and that by working together, they can achieve outcomes beyond what it is possible to achieve by working in isolation. RCE Severn also aims to engage with partners to identify resource needs and to seek opportunities for funding.

What do we mean by ‘sustainability education’?
Sustainability education is more than just transferring knowledge about sustainability issues and how to tackle them. It has a focus on changing mindsets, developing skills in critical and systemic thinking, and enhancing capacity for facilitating change. It is about providing people, communities and organisations with a new set of skills and knowledge, so that they can identify and respond to sustainability challenges, in ways which lead to long-term and sustained change.

Transformative sustainability education is different from some conventional approaches to sustainability training and awareness raising. Some of these conventional approaches may simply highlight issues for audiences, but might not enable them to develop a capacity to continue to question or develop capacity to address the issues. Audiences might be inspired to address these issues during training workshops and for short periods of time thereafter, but often are not able to implement changes. Sustainability education focuses not just on the content (what the issues are) but also on the learning process. For those facilitating sustainability education, we need to look closely at the methods we use to engage with our audiences to bring about long-term change. For our audiences, we need to consider what skills and knowledge they need, over and above simply understanding the issues, to bring about long-term change.

For more information visit www.glos.ac.uk/rce
What are ‘sustainability issues’?
The areas which can be addressed under the heading of ‘sustainability issues’ include environmental, social and economic aspects. They may be of relevance to individuals, communities and organisations. They include:

- Urban regeneration
- Community development
- Energy
- Transport
- Ecology
- Pollution
- Climate change
- Peak oil
- Resource efficiency
- Carbon footprinting
- Workforce development
- Organisational learning
- Corporate responsibility
- Human rights
- Social justice

The importance of these issues varies between different communities, localities and organisations, sustainability education seeks to explore these issues in ways which are meaningful to people, and which enables them to respond appropriately.

Partners and collaborators with RCE Severn
Key players and partners with RCE Severn are drawn from a wide range of sectors, as summarised in the diagram above. The diagram categorises each sector as containing both ‘audiences’ and ‘collaborators’ with whom RCE Severn is engaged. Partners and collaborators include those involved in communication, public engagement, media, learning, education, training, social change and organisational development.

The RCE Severn core partners are engaged with businesses, government organisations, schools, colleges, universities, and with broader public engagement, social learning and education programmes. Partners from diverse sectors continue to identify opportunities to learn from each other, and to develop new projects and programmes which build on existing work taking place in the region.
Co-ordination by the University of Gloucestershire

The University of Gloucestershire is the co-ordinating organisation for RCe Severn. The university is well known for its own sustainability credentials, embedding these principles in the courses it teaches, in the way it manages its own estates, through its research, consultancy, training and knowledge exchange programmes with external agencies, and through its broad portfolio of professional and public engagement programmes. The university has been the recipient of many sustainability and green awards over recent years. The university was ranked as No 1 in the People and Planet’s Green League of universities (2008) and awarded a Green Gown for Continuous Improvement (2008). In terms of environmental management, the University of Gloucestershire was the first university in England to be accredited with ISO14001 across a range of activities including curriculum. The university is also a prolific proponent of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives at the local level, in the region, nationally and internationally. www.glos.ac.uk/vision/sustainability

Role of the United Nations University

The United Nations University (UNU) is the lead organisation co-ordinating the activities of 55 Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs) in Education for Sustainable Development. The UNU is an agency of the United Nations. The mission of the UNU is to contribute, through research and capacity building, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare, that are a concern of the United Nations, its peoples and member states. The UNU is dedicated to the generation and transfer of knowledge, and the strengthening of individual and institutional capacities in furtherance of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In fulfilling its mission, the UNU fosters intellectual cooperation among scholars, scientists, and practitioners worldwide, especially those in the developing world, and functions as:

— an international community of scholars;
— a bridge between the United Nations and the international academic community;
— a think-tank for the United Nations system;
— a builder of capacity, particularly in developing countries; and
— a platform for dialogue and new and creative ideas.

The UNU produces a web-magazine, Our World 2.0, which focuses on its key areas of concern regarding sustainability issues. The web-magazine provides articles and video briefs to inspire people to learn and explore the sustainability agenda, with a particular focus on climate change, oil depletion and food security. The central tenet of the UNU web-magazine is that we can use our collective knowledge, technology and design to facilitate creativity, innovation, and, most notably, collaboration amongst people. Our World 2.0 can be viewed at http://ourworld.unu.edu/en
OTHER RCES ACROSS THE WORLD

The UNU has acknowledged 55 RCEs throughout the world to date, in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the Middle East, South America, the Caribbean, North and Central America. These RCEs include the following:

Africa
Ghana
Greater Mbarara, Uganda
Greater Nairobi, Kenya
Kano, Nigeria
KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
Lagos, Nigeria
Makana and Rural Eastern Cape, South Africa
Maputo, Mozambique
Swaziland
Zomba, Malawi

In Europe and the Middle East
Barcelona, Spain
Creias-Oeste, Portugal
East Midlands, UK
Graz-Styria, Austria
Hamburg, Germany
Ireland
Jordan
Munich, Germany
North East, UK
Nuremberg, Germany
Rhine-Meuse region
Samara, Russia
Severn Region (West Midlands & South West), UK
Skane, Sweden
Southern North Sea, Belgium/
Netherlands/France

In the Asia-Pacific region
Anji, China
Beijing, China
Bogor, Indonesia
Cebu, Philippines
Cha-am, Thailand
Chubu, Japan
Greater Sendai, Japan
Guwahati, India
Hyogo-Kobe, Japan
Incheon, Korea
Kitakyushu, Japan
Kodagu, India
Kyrgyzstan
Lucknow, India
Okayama, Japan
Pacific Island Countries
Penang, Malaysia
Pune, India
Tongyeong, Korea
Trang, Thailand
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Yokohama, Japan

In South America, the Caribbean, North & Central America
Curitiba-Parana, Brazil
In North and Central America
Grand Rapids, USA
Greater North Central Texas, USA
Greater Sudbury, Canada
Montreal, Canada
Saskatchewan, Canada
Toronto, Canada
Western Jalisco, Mexico
The University of Gloucestershire was ranked as No 1 in the People and Planet’s Green League of universities and awarded a Green Gown for Continuous Improvement.

The role of an RCE
RCEs bring together organisations at local and regional levels to jointly promote education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to local and regional communities. Partner organisations in RCEs include those involved in ‘formal ESD’ such as universities, colleges and schools, and those involved in ‘informal ESD’ such as the media, environmental education centres, science museums, community organisations, environmental regulators and advisory bodies, local and regional government, the media, local businesses and local NGOs. RCEs aspire to achieve the goals of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), by translating its global objectives into the context of the local communities in which they operate.

RCEs aim to build an innovative platform to share information and experiences, and to promote dialogue amongst local and regional stakeholders through partnerships for the promotion of sustainable development. At the heart of the work of the RCEs is the goal to deliver ‘transformative education’, contributing to the transformation of current education and training systems to meet local and regional goals of sustainable living and livelihood. Underpinning this, RCEs are also intended to stimulate research and development into ESD delivered through a wide range of collaborative activities.

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For more information visit www.glos.ac.uk/rce

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 to 2014)
The overarching goal of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. It is intended that this educational effort will encourage changes in thinking and action that will enable us to move forwards to a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.

The objectives for the DESD are to:
— facilitate networking, linkages, exchange and interaction among stakeholders in ESD;
— foster an increased quality of teaching and learning in education for sustainable development;
— help countries make progress towards and attain the millennium development goals through ESD efforts;
— provide countries with new opportunities to incorporate ESD into education reform efforts.
1.10.08

**RCE Severn Partners Meet for the First Time**

The RCE Severn partnership met for the first time at Oxtalls Campus, University of Gloucestershire on the 1st October. The meeting brought together partners from government agencies, business and industry, NGOs, the media as well as schools, further and higher education. Over 40 people attended and defined a basis for collaboration across the region. Interactions proved very fruitful with colleagues ‘boundary spanning’ and engaging in ‘fusion’ activities. Many interesting project ideas arose at the meeting, and the RCE Severn team will support partners in turning these projects into reality. The partnership is now in the process of formalising a structure for governance to manage the activity taking place within the RCE. Working Groups have also began to form as common strands of activity emerge across the partnership.

21.11.08

**Soundings in Sustainability Literacy**

Soundings in Sustainability Literacy is an exploratory event where sustainability educators from across the country will gather to generate new insights into two crucial questions:  
— what sustainability skills do graduates need to deal with the challenges of the 21st century?  
— what active learning techniques can help them gain those skills?

The insights will form the basis of a concrete and practical book and video resource which will help inform the embedding of sustainability literacy skills across higher education. The event will be held at the University of Gloucestershire in a solarium overlooking a lake and includes an organic, local and season lunch. The facilitation method will make use of speed networking and Open Space to encourage a dynamic exchange among participants and it promises to be a highly stimulating day.

Arising from the event, The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy will be printed on recycled paper and will contain short chapters by participants on sustainability literacy skills such as systems thinking, values clarification, ecoliteracy skills, and a range of other skills that students will need to lead their lives, businesses, and societies within the new realities of the 21st century.