SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Regional Centre of Excellence Consultation Paper

South East England Development Agency,
Development & Infrastructure Division,
3rd Floor,
SEEDA Headquarters,
Cross Lanes, Guildford. GU1 1YA
Tel : 01483 484 282
Fax : 01483 484 249

southeastexcellence@seeda.co.uk

July 2004

Government Office for the South East

SEEDA South East England Development Agency
Working for England's World Class Region

South East England Regional Assembly

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Content

02 Introduction
02 Background
03 Approach
04 Proposed Principles
05 Framework of Activity
08 Target Audience
09 Alignment With Other Activities
10 Organisation Structure
11 Funding and Income
12 Next Steps
13 Summary of Consultation Questions
14 Timing and Format of Responses
15 Appendix 1

02 Introduction

"South East Excellence, a centre of excellence for improving high quality cross-disciplinary skills and training in the built environment."

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Introduction

1.1 In the Urban White Paper - *Our Town and Cities: The Future Delivering an Urban Renaissance* - the Government asked the nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) covering England, to establish Regional Centres of Excellence (RCE) to determine the best approach to improving high quality cross-disciplinary skills and training in the built environment in each region. This request was reinforced in the Government's *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* document (Feburary 2003).

1.2 The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) has joined with the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and the South East England Regional Assembly (the Assembly) to form an initial Steering Group to take forward South East Excellence – the Centre of Excellence for the region.

1.3 Following extensive research and consultation, this paper sets out proposals for South East Excellence. The consultation paper can be downloaded from www.seeda.co.uk and can be made available as a printed document on request.

1.4 The consultation will inform the nature, status and priorities of South East Excellence to ensure that it addresses issues specific to the region. As part of the consultation, three sub-regional workshops are planned for September by SEEDA and its regional partners. The debate will also be informed by research commissioned from the University of Greenwich, with Oxford Brookes and Brighton Universities. This is using a limited number of in-depth case studies to review employer-training strategies and produce an initial development programme and action plan for South East Excellence. The results of the consultation will be made available in November 2004.

1.5 Specific consultation questions are set, but comment is invited more generally on the problems identified and the solutions offered.

This consultation paper seeks views on the nature, status and priorities of South East Excellence, a centre of excellence for improving high quality cross-disciplinary skills and training in the built environment in the South East region.

Background

2.1 We are not, of course, entering this phase of South East Excellence's development from a standing start.

2.2 In 2001, GOSE and the Assembly hosted a programme of urban renaissance seminars throughout the region. These identified a number of issues central to the successful delivery of the urban renaissance agenda in the South East and priorities for early action.

2.3 In June 2001, SEEDA commissioned Renaissance London to conduct a scoping study for developing a Regional Centre of Excellence (reporting in March 2002). This explored the demand for skills and the training currently available within the region. This included a questionnaire survey to 2,544 organisations and individuals in the region; semi structured interviews with key stakeholders; and workshops across the region.

2.4 We have continued to consult stakeholders and interest groups informally. We have developed a solid base of excellent practice across a number of activities that are already addressing aspects of skills and supporting delivery of sustainable communities in the South East.

Approach

3.1 There is a risk that Regional Centres of Excellence seek, or are directed, to become 'all regeneration things to all people' and, in the process, lose focus and water-down outcomes. The approach in the South East thus far has been to develop the building blocks of "excellence" from the bottom up with the initial focus on quality design in the built environment.

3.2 The South East faces considerable growth pressures. The Government's *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* sets out an ambition to build an additional 200,000 homes by 2016, over and above those already planned for through Regional Planning Guidance. Whilst a large proportion of these are planned for the three Growth Areas in the region (Thames Gateway, Ashford and Milton Keynes / Aylesbury), the pressure for more housing is one that the whole region is facing.

3.3 In the South East, there is a careful balance needed between stimulating demand in areas of weaker economic activity, against meeting demand in economic hot spots.

We also need to make certain that housing provision is matched by the necessary infrastructure investment to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability. If we are to achieve this balance is it critical that those tasked with delivery in the region have the appropriate skills, together with access to suitable specialist advice and support.

3.4 In light of these pressures, it remains our intention for South East Excellence to maintain a focus on skills for interventions in the built environment. The design of the built environment can be a key factor in achieving social cohesion, safer and healthier communities and economic prosperity.

3.5 It is this very broad agenda that South East Excellence will seek to contribute to and thus it will need to identify initial priorities. As well as reflecting the Government's original remit to RDAs, this approach reflects that taken by Sir John Egan, whose report on the skills necessary to deliver sustainable communities was published in April 2004.

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Proposed Principles

4.1 There are a number of principles that we put forward for South East Excellence:

- South East Excellence should support the broader concept of renaissance rather than confining itself to regeneration and / or renewal. This ensures that South East Excellence responds to the needs of those parts of the region dealing with the problems of success and economic growth as well as areas of deprivation.

- Whilst the origins of the remit from Government are grounded in urban renaissance, we believe that many of the principles of 'renaissance' are applicable and important to all communities whether they are urban or rural. South East Excellence ought, therefore, to be concerned with both.

- The initial focus of Government was on professional skills to deliver urban renaissance. We believe that should remain an early priority but we also believe that well-informed and enabled communities are as important to the delivery of renaissance as a skilled professional resource. South East Excellence ought, therefore, to be concerned with both.

- South East Excellence should focus on supporting those involved in planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities rather than providing services directly to the public.

- South East Excellence should work through others. It should avoid duplication by not being a service provider but concentrating on communication, dissemination and networking and should support and broker innovation and collaboration.

- South East Excellence will not be a policy making body but should support policy implementation through practical advice, guidance and skills support. However, South East Excellence should be more than simply a neutral, objective, information exchange. It should develop a strong agenda and philosophy to enable it to act as an advocate and champion.

- South East Excellence may commission specific pieces of work but it should not be a grant making or funding body, nor should it be a general source of advice on grant sources.

- South East Excellence should promote existing and develop new benchmarks and good practice standards against which practitioners can compare their own activities. It should encourage existing providers to meet / exceed these standards and to adopt the South East Excellence brand, developing the "excellence family" across the region.

- South East Excellence should make use of electronic networks using a website that is dynamic and evolves over time with a virtual 'centre' or hub and small advisory staff. However, regional consultation emphasised the need to reflect the varying priorities across the region. To facilitate this, South East Excellence should have a sub-regional presence. We suggest that the emerging regional network of Architecture Centres provides a point of focus from which to build a sub-regional dimension.

Q

Questions for consultation

1. Do you support the principles set out for South East Excellence?

Framework of Activity

5.1 The core principles set out above have been built into a model for the structure and the activities of South East Excellence, which has been adopted by the Steering Group and which we seek the region's views on.

Perceived Need

5.2 Respondents to the Renaissance London scoping exercise identified specific skills deficiencies in the region:

- Design and operation of projects – especially physical intervention.

- Development process - development finance, risk assessment, project design and implementation.

- Securing quality interventions, mainly in design terms, but not exclusively.

- Effective delivery - project appraisal and management.

- Strategic thinking - visioning, leadership and entrepreneurial skills, particularly amongst elected Members, communities and voluntary sector.

- Skills for engaging communities.

- Partnership and communication including cross team working.

5.3 The South East has strong provision in tertiary education - 393 programmes / courses were identified as relevant to the agenda with provision particularly high to the west of the region. Approximately 6,000 students complete courses each year. Despite this, many practitioners felt that skills requirements lie outside the current activity of Higher and Further Education providers and need to be more systematically identified and brought to the training agenda.

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Framework of Activity

5.4 The scoping exercise identified the following areas of focus:

- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as the key pathway to efficient and effective change.
- Up-skilling those already in work to achieve a step change in regional capacity in preference to undergraduate training.
- Facilitating experiential learning through activity such as peer group networks for mutual support and study tours for sharing best practice.
- Value of websites and associated bulletin boards in fostering self-sustaining specialist peer groups.
- The use of innovative ways of improving the skills and knowledge of practitioners, including e-learning/distance learning.
- Collaboration across disciplines, developing generic skills, in practice and in training remains an obvious area for South East Excellence to assist.

5.5 The broad service areas identified as priorities for South East Excellence were:

- Directory of information
- Advice / best practice
- Networking
- Website services
- Research best practice

5.6 Reflecting this approach, much of the activity of South East Excellence will be the coordination and marketing of existing 'excellent' activities delivered across the region (rather than seeking to replace or duplicate them) using the common South East Excellence brand.

5.7 There are already a number of skills-related initiatives that partners are delivering with SEEDA's support. These include the Architecture Centre network, the Regional Design Panel, the South East Design Champions Club, Creating Quality Places, Shaping Places education programme, Art Plus award scheme, South East Regeneration Network, Constructing Excellence and a joint professional institutes website. (www.cpdevents.org.uk).

Activity Framework

	Design Quality	Involving Communities	Enhancing Skills
Specialist information, advice and "enabling".	Architecture Centres Regional Design Panel South East Excellence website	Planning Aid Community design initiatives - Enquiry By Design, Planning for Real South East Excellence website	CPD website and related events Short courses / bespoke regional training Master classes South East Excellence website
Toolkits, benchmarks and guidance.	Sustainability Checklist Design Quality Indicator Local design codes and pattern books Village Design Statements	Placecheck Healthcheck	Accreditation of learning Self assessment tools Constructing Excellence
Seeing is believing (study tours and networks).	Design Champions Club	Regen network	Action learning networks / peer group learning sets
Research, demonstration and pilots.	Creating Quality Places Art Plus Award Scheme	Creating Quality Places Shaping Places	Pilot Short courses Action research Constructing Excellence

There will be many more examples in the region and the aim is that more organisations will put forward activity and join this 'family' as South East Excellence becomes established and develops.

5.8 A framework of activity (see above) is proposed, focusing on three themes and four broad types of intervention. Examples of the types of activity that could form part of this framework and thus the South East Excellence family are set out below. Clearly, truly excellent activity will fall under a number of the headings but the framework suggested is intended as a broad guide.

Q

Questions for consultation

2. How, and by whom, could any omissions in skills be addressed?

3. How do you think gaps in knowledge and behaviour can best be remedied?

4. How do you think South East Excellence can stimulate new types of training provision in the region?

5. What practical action would you like to see South East Excellence take in the short term (1-2 years) and medium term (3-5 years)?

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Target Audience

6.1 The initial target audience is seen as the core occupations identified by the Egan Review, people who spend almost all of their professional time in activities to do with planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities. These are the built environment professionals – planners, architects, urban designers, transport engineers etc - and decision makers and influencers – staff from local, regional and central government, developers and investors, staff from voluntary and community associations.

6.2 The regional scoping study found that some interests have not been reached by activity to date and are not fully engaged. Critically, these are essentially those who fund developments: developers, landowners, consultants / professional practices, and finance institutions. An urgent priority task for South East Excellence is to draw these into the dialogue.

6.3 We propose that the immediate priorities for South East Excellence are
1. supporting skills development amongst local authority built environment professionals;
2. supporting the local authority leadership role; and
3. engaging the development industry.

Q

Questions for consultation

6. What role should South East Excellence play in encouraging employers (across the public and private sectors) to address omissions in skills, knowledge and behaviour?

7. How would you like to see South East Excellence support continuous skills review and development amongst practitioners in the region?

Alignment With Other Activities

National Network of Centres of Excellence

7.1 The Egan Review of skills for sustainable communities has recommended that a National Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Community Skills be established. Whilst details of this are still developing, this centre is seen as working with Regional Centres of Excellence including South East Excellence. The emerging Regional Centres of Excellence have already established a learning network to share experience and are collaborating on an initiative to establish a common quality management framework.

Broader Policy Agenda

7.2 South East Excellence needs to have a core area of focus to give direction and to enable it to achieve practical change, hence our decision to continue to focus activity on a built environment agenda. But clearly, to achieve sustainable communities in the South East, we need to connect physical change and development with economic and social change.

7.3 In terms of national policy context, areas of linkage include:

- The Government's *National Skills Strategy '21st Century Skills – Realising Our Potential'* launched in July 2003. This seeks to establish a new national Skills Alliance to oversee the implementation of the strategy. SEEDA is coordinating the development of a skills partnership structure to take this forward in the South East region through the Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance.
- A number of initiatives exist aimed at developing learning communities. *The Neighbourhood Renewal Skills and Knowledge Programme – The Learning Curve (October 2002)* - sets out the Government's commitment to a step change in the skills and knowledge of everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal. Taking forward the 23 action points in the Learning Curve is managed nationally by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and regionally by GOSE.

The Department for Education and Skills published '*Mutual Advantage: working with voluntary and community organisations on learning and skills*' in 2001, which led to the Widening Participation, Access to Learning and Future Skills initiatives, aimed at the voluntary and community sector.

The Home Office review of the Government's support for community capacity building (*Building Civil Renewal*, consultation proposals December 2003) and the development of a *Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework - Change Up (June 2004)* following on from the cross cutting review of the voluntary and community sector, also address this agenda.

South East Excellence will need to be aware of work in these areas and make appropriate connections via initiatives such as the Social Inclusion Partnership South East and the Regeneration Network.

- At the heart of the Government's skills strategy is a network of Sector Skills Councils to work with employers and employees in the sector they represent. Again, RDAs and their regional partners are charged with determining specific regional priorities. South East Excellence will need to connect with appropriate activity such as national and regional activity to support the construction sector (Constructing Excellence).

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Organisation Structure

8.1 South East Excellence's relationship with the many stakeholders and interests across the region will be important to its success. This relationship will need to develop and evolve over time. Our immediate tasks are to develop a mechanism for facilitating this process and also reaching a view on the type of entity South East Excellence should be in the short to medium term.

8.2 Three options are being considered for the structure of South East Excellence:

- Part of SEEDA, but with a multi agency steering group and wider reference group.
- Stand alone independent vehicle, such as a Company Limited by Guarantee.
- Contract out activity to an existing delivery organisation.

8.3 Currently option one is our preferred option (see Appendix 1). The intention would be to maintain a level of independence through steering group arrangements. We feel it would be unwise to develop a separate legal entity with associated office and other overhead costs. In order to cover these costs, South East Excellence would need to generate income and thus could risk duplicating or competing with existing regional activity. Clearly as South East Excellence develops and evolves, this approach may need to change and a separate legal entity could be appropriate. We do not believe that this is an appropriate step at this time.

Funding and Income

9.1 The next phase in developing South East Excellence will be a detailed business planning and three year funding strategy in order to provide a sound basis for approaching organisations for core funding. The structure that is developed needs to be financially sustainable.

9.2 Many of the activities of South East Excellence will include the coordination and marketing of existing activities but additional resources will be required to deliver South East Excellence. A balance needs to be agreed between funding for internal staff (the hub) and funding to support a catalyst role.

9.3 South East Excellence will need to seek core funding but may also need to consider limited income generating activity or a membership fee structure.

Q

Questions for consultation

8. Do you agree with the proposals for managing South East Excellence in the short / medium term?

9. What structures do you think South East Excellence should adopt to encourage collaboration across the region?

10. How would you like to see the services of South East Excellence delivered?

11. Whilst information services would be free, South East Excellence may need to charge for other services. What services would you / your organisation be willing to pay for?

12. South East Excellence could generate income from operating a membership system – would you support this approach?

13. How do you think South East Excellence should balance the need to resource a central hub and be a catalyst for change in the region?

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Next Steps

10.1 We aim to have completed consultation by early October 2004. The next step is the detailed development phase, which includes branding criteria, business planning, developing a fully costed programme of services and activities, securing financial support, confirming local and sub-regional partners' support for the development of the sub-regional approach, and a programme of early action and activities, allowing the hub to develop incrementally. We hope to be able to be in a position to hold an initial launch by December 2004.

Summary of Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the principles set out for South East Excellence?

2. How, and by whom, could any omissions in skills be addressed?

3. How do you think gaps in knowledge and behaviour can best be remedied?

4. How do you think South East Excellence can stimulate new types of training provision in the region?

5. What practical action would you like to see South East Excellence take in the short term (1-2 years) and medium term (3-5 years)?

6. What role should South East Excellence play in encouraging employers (across the public and private sector) to address omissions in skills, knowledge and behaviour?

7. How would you like to see South East Excellence support continuous skills review and development amongst practitioners in the region?

8. Do you agree with the proposals for managing South East Excellence in the short / medium term?

9. What structures do you think South East Excellence should adopt to encourage collaboration across the region?

10. How would you like to see the services of South East Excellence delivered?

11. Whilst information services would be free, South East Excellence may need to charge for other services. What services would you / your organisation be willing to pay for?

12. South East Excellence could generate income from operating a membership system – would you support this approach?

13. How do you think South East Excellence should balance the need to resource a central hub and be a catalyst for change in the region?

SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE
SUSTAINABLE RENAISSANCE

Timing and Format of Response

12.1 The South East Excellence Steering Group welcomes your responses to the consultation questions by close of business Friday, 8th October 2004.

12.2 When responding, please indicate if it is in an individual capacity. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please state who the organisation represents and how the views of its Members were assembled.

12.3 We will be making the results of the consultation available in November 2004 but will not be providing responses to individual submissions.

12.4 Responses should be as brief as possible (maximum four sides of A4).

12.5 We would prefer electronic submissions where possible. We request that you indicate in the body of your response:

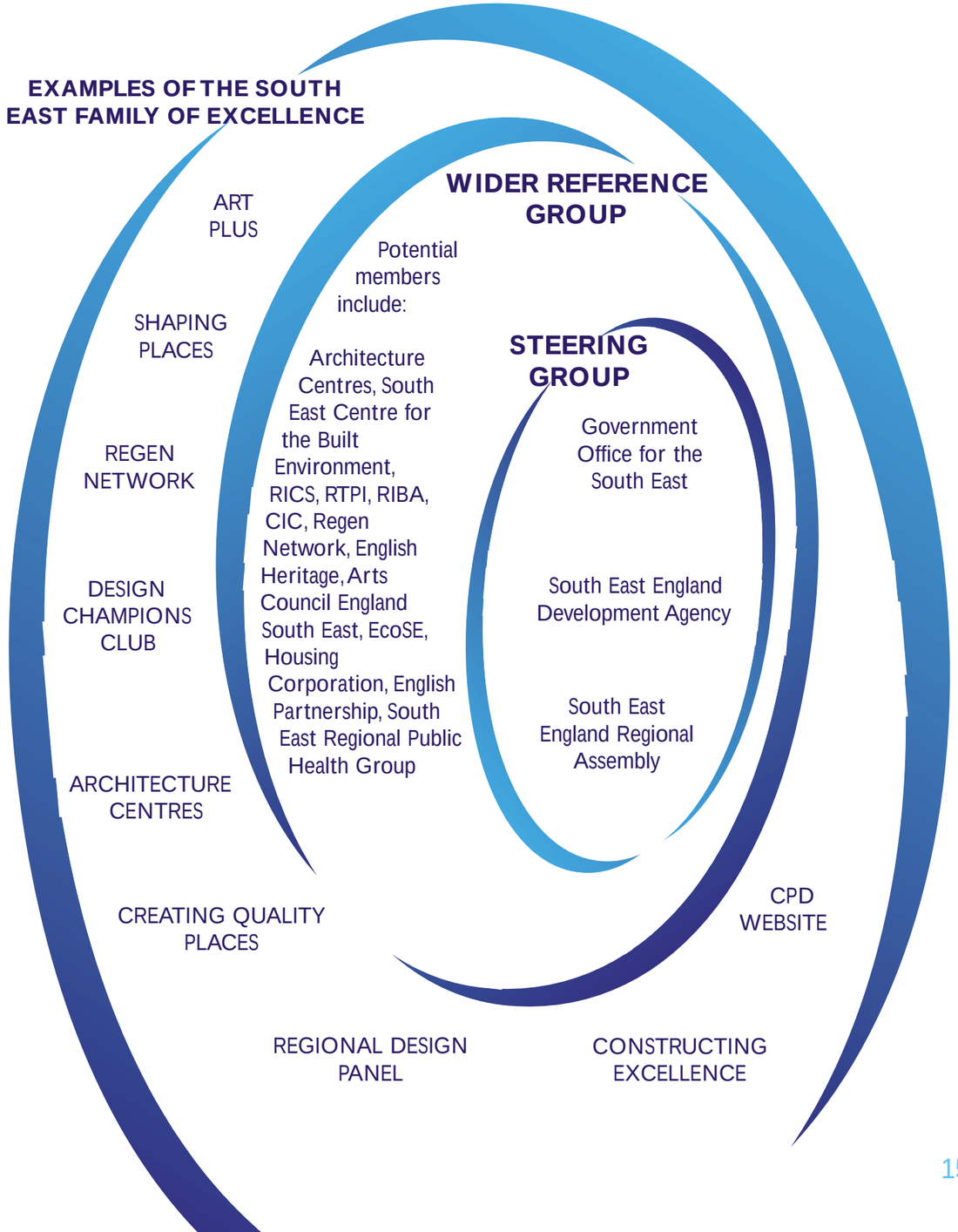
(a) whether you are happy for all, or any, of your response to be reproduced (or quoted) and attributed to you solely in connection with the South East Excellence consultation and for no other purpose, or

(b) whether you wish your response to be treated confidentially and not reproduced or quoted for any purpose.

12.6 You should be aware that if a preference is not indicated, all responses received may be made public and in the case of electronic responses, general confidentially disclaimers that often appear at the end of e-mails will be disregarded.

12.7 Responses should be submitted to:

E-mail:
southeastexcellence@seeda.co.uk
(In the e-mail 'subject' box please type the text:
Consultation response: name of organisation/individual)

Miranda Pearce,
Urban Renaissance Manager,
South East England
Development Agency,
Development and
Infrastructure Division,
3rd Floor, SEEDA Headquarters,
Cross Lanes, Guildford. GU1 1YA
Tel: 01483 484 282
Fax: 01483 484 249

Appendix 1 - South East Excellence Organisation Structure