

REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRES

Background:

The last report regarding Regional Resource Centres¹ (RRCs) was made to the Programme Co-ordination Committee in March 1999, and to the Board of Governors through the TC Annual Report in June 1999. That report noted that four of five regions – three through Regional Co-operative Agreements – had taken ownership of the idea, and had made a solid start towards the identification of Centres. RCA, AFRA and ARCAL had each met to establish criteria for selection of RRCs, and the first such Centres had started to emerge.

The following lessons learned and conclusions were also reported at that time:

- RRCs can differ significantly between regions, themes, and functions (training centres, reference centres, service centres); there is no one set of criteria that will fit every centre.
- The Secretariat's role is to *facilitate* the evolution of the concept, but not to *direct* it. Practice has shown that Member States themselves know best what type of centres would best serve their regions, and are rigorous in their selection of centres which they are counting upon to be of value to them.
- In addition to seeking advice from the Agency on technical criteria for RRCs – and in particular from the Thematic Planning process – Member States should work with the professional scientific and technical associations in their region.
- Designation as an RRC entails certain obligations and responsibilities. To the degree possible, it should be cost neutral (i.e. countries or other institutions who benefit from services of a centre, should pay for them.) However, the willingness of an institution to offer certain facilities free of charge or other in-kind services may become one of the selection criteria used by Member States.
- It may be useful to set a time limit after which designations would be reviewed (AFRA and RCA have already set this limit at two years; ARCAL Members have agreed to review their list of Designated Centres every three years.)
- Designation of an RRC does not preclude the existence of other centres handling the same theme in the same region. Rationalization of resources through such a designation need not lead to a monopoly situation. Indeed, an RRC could play a key role in fostering a regional network. Such a centre could also pull experts out of the “satellite centres” to form Specialized Teams as required.
- There is no *a priori* reason for a region to designate RRCs should Member States prefer other ways of meeting their needs.

Current Situation:

Latin America

At the XVI Technical Co-ordination Meeting of ARCAL in May 1999, participants adopted procedures to be followed by Member States and the Agency for the evaluation of institutions nominated as candidates for RRCs. Using these procedures, participants reviewed 65 proposals that had been submitted by Member States based on selection criteria approved the previous year. Of these 65 proposals, 27 were retained for further study.

¹ Previously referred to as “Centres of Excellence”

Since then, Technical Divisions at the Agency have reviewed 13 of the proposed institutions, and have supported the nomination of 12 of them. These will be presented to the XVII Technical Co-ordination Meeting of ARCAL in May 2000 for final nomination.

Three additional Centres specializing in the maintenance and repair of nuclear instrumentation were identified earlier through an ARCAL project. These centres – in Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela – have provided training courses and repaired equipment to the full satisfaction of Member States.

Africa

In the past year Member States of AFRA nominated candidate centres in four areas of activity: radiation oncology and medical physics (4 candidates), non-destructive testing (3), radioactive waste management (3), and repair, preventive maintenance and quality control of medical and scientific instruments (2). Agency technical officers were then asked to analyze the application questionnaires.

At the end of November 1999, the Field Management Committee (FMC) of AFRA made an initial selection of centres based on the reports on Agency technical staff and their own experience regarding the candidate centres' managerial, administrative and financial capabilities. An effort was made to find one Anglophone, one Francophone centre in each technical area, a task which will be completed at the March meeting of the FMC. In certain instances, further clarification was then sought from pre-selected centres in light of comments made by technical officers. If these clarifications are satisfactory, the next step is an audit of pre-selected centres by independent experts in the field plus a member of the FMC. Centres selected following the audit will be recommended to the AFRA Meeting of Representatives for designation as RRCs.

East Asia and Pacific

RCA was the first Co-operative Agreement to consider the concept of RRCs and have only designated one centre – the Bone Bank at Singapore National University – to date have several designed centre.

At the 28th RCA General Conference in September 1999, Member States received a list of candidate centres in five major areas: access to clean drinking water (4 candidates); management of the marine coastal environment (5); air pollution (9); clean and energy-efficient processes (4); and distance learning materials (4). Technical officers participated in meetings where RRCs were originally proposed before being submitted to the General Conference.

Individual candidacies have also been received for tissue banking, gamma irradiation services, and radioisotope laboratories services.

The Agency has already used a number of the candidate centres in the five major areas for analysis of data, and provision of training and experts in the context of a major RCA project. The use of these centres was done with the advice of technical officers.

Following the General Conference, RCA Members reviewed a draft questionnaire designed to help in the process of selecting centres from amongst the candidates. They are expected to adopt a revised version of this questionnaire at their meeting in Mumbai at the end of February 2000, and to make a self-analysis of nominated centres on the basis of this questionnaire by the end of March. A Working Group will be created to evaluate the questionnaires and make recommendations to the next meeting of RCA. Members are also expected to come up with means for evaluating the performance of RRCs in the future.

Europe

Member States in Europe have taken a more informal approach to the selection of RRCs; nonetheless, a number of Centres have emerged naturally through experience and practice. The Slovak Nuclear Regulatory Authority, for example, plays a leading role in the regulatory sector, as does the Nuclear Research Institute in Rez, Czech Republic, in WWR reactor pressure vessel technology. The Josef Stefan

Institute in Slovenia hosts up to ten major training events and group activity events per year, and is seen as a major science and technology institute beyond the borders of Europe. The training centre at the PAKS Nuclear Power Plant in Hungary has developed a model of Systematic Approach to Training (SAT).

Other centres in Europe that are considered to be RRCs include: the State Office for Nuclear Safety in the Czech Republic, APO in Croatia, INChT in Poland, Obninsk in the Russian Federation, and Demokritos (NCSR) in Greece.

West Asia

Member States in the West Asia region do not have a formal co-operative agreement, although there is discussion regarding the possibility of establishing one amongst the Arabic-speaking countries.

Only Iran has proposed to the Agency the use of its centre in Yazd for irradiation processing for industrial material. This proposal has not been evaluated by Member States.