

## AT A GLANCE

### *Generic Skills*

#### Definition

The Egan Review suggests that, in addition to a number of technical competences, professionals and practitioners dealing with the development of sustainable communities would benefit from what are described as 'generic skills'. Simply stated, generic skills are ones that apply across a variety of job roles and life situations. They are sometimes known by other names such as 'employability skills' and 'transferable skills'.

The Review identifies 13 generic skills sets that are vital to the delivery of sustainable communities. Professionals and practitioners need to understand what these skills are, why they are important, and how they can best be developed and nurtured. Training and learning professionals need to ensure that they are delivered through the courses and materials that they provide. Employers need to ensure that professional staff are given adequate opportunities for personal development so that they can enhance their generic skills.

A key underlying principle arising out of Egan's emphasis on cross-sector, multi-disciplinary team and partnership working is that all those involved in planning and developing sustainable communities should understand each other's perspectives, skills and roles.

#### How is the Egan theme reflected in IGNITE?

Generic skills is a key theme in the IGNITE system. Publications and events relating to the theme and each of its sub themes can be interrogated using the system's search engine. The 11 sub themes on generic skills used by IGNITE are as follows:

- **Communication**

This concerns being able to communicate messages effectively to a range of audiences and using a variety of media. It includes: effective listening, public speaking, report writing, media strategies, presentation and using the media.

- **Leadership**

This concerns envisioning and communicating a possible future state, covering all aspects of the community, and possible ways of achieving it. It also concerns working with stakeholders to define the vision and objectives; leading a cross-sector or multi-disciplinary team to deliver on these objectives. It includes: visioning, team leadership (various levels),

decision making, coaching and monitoring; being able to bring people together from a wide range of backgrounds and skills to achieve added value.

- **Business planning**

This concerns all aspects of developing an effective project or programme and drawing-up a realistic work plan. It includes: objective setting, making the business case, market analysis, appraisal, briefing consultants and teams.

- **Capacity building**

This concerns the skills needed to enable local organisation and governance, and to promote strong involvement by local residents, schools and businesses. It includes a wide variety of training and development activities intended to improve skills, know-how and capabilities.

- **Performance management**

This concerns making good decisions on the basis of sound evidence and an assessment of the risks. It involves an analytical approach, clear decision-making, learning from mistakes, and a willingness to learn from the results of evaluation. It includes: continuous improvement and contracting arrangements.

- **Project management**

This concerns the process of managing a project through to a successful conclusion, and doing so within an agreed timescale and budget. It also involves the effective monitoring and evaluation of projects, and ensuring that progress is made towards the agreed objectives despite the constraints and challenges. It includes: work monitoring, evaluation strategies and techniques, and the application of critical path analysis and similar project management techniques.

- **Financial management**

This concerns managing the effective and efficient application of funding and the budget process. It also involves recording and accounting for the use of available resources, forecasting, budgeting, the financial aspects of business planning, financial monitoring and reporting, identifying funding sources and constraints.

- **Partnership working**

This concerns effective team working – working in teams comprising different professions and organisations to deliver the desired results. It includes: team leadership, partnership building and working; and ensuring that all stakeholders remain informed and committed.

- **Consultation**

This concerns all kinds of effective consultation with stakeholders, organisations and the wider community. This involves operating the organisation in a customer-focused way – with a high level of customer awareness and methods to secure feedback. It includes: statements of community involvement, consultation procedures, consultation strategies and methods, and addressing the needs of different audiences.

- **Change management**

This concerns managing staff and resources in order to achieve a more effective organisation and/or a new set of outcomes. It includes: process mapping, process re-engineering, diversity, equal opportunities and the management of change.

- **Conflict resolution**

This concerns being able to satisfactorily resolve situations where a consensus cannot be reached. It includes: negotiation and mediation.

**It may be helpful to note that** ‘generic skills’ is a term that is widely used, but can be interpreted variously by different professions and countries. It is important to recognise that it is not a straightforward matter to present generic skills through a virtual system such as IGNITE:

1. In the first case, examples of good practice in the development and application of generic skills are often ‘embedded’ in reports and publications – they have to be sought out and highlighted. The same is true of the treatment of generic skills in learning and training programmes. You may therefore have to delve into the system to discover exactly what you want.
2. In the second case, many of the generic skills identified by Egan can only be acquired through cross-sector and multi-disciplinary team or partnership working. You can use the IGNITE system to understand how this can be achieved, but many of skills have to be learned through practice.

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