Professional Development and Lifelong Learning. These would develop and improve both generic and specific skills required to facilitate successful community stakeholder participation within the spatial planning process, particularly focusing on the personal attributes necessary to allow genuine engagement to flourish.

This research confirms a disparity of views as to the general skill levels among practitioners. Whilst there are reported deficiencies within the practitioners, nearly half the survey considered that their *profession* – rather than individuals - possessed appropriate skills.

Does everyone need to be equally skilled?

The research also pointed to a developing distinction between skills which can be taught and assessed and 'soft' skills and personal attributes which, whilst they can be fostered through teaching and learning strategies do not lend themselves to formal training and/or assessment. This reinforces the need for education and practitioner mentors to encourage self-awareness and self-development alongside technical skills training.

The empowerment agenda requires a range of adapted and new skills. Facilitation, listening and effective dialogue skills, combined with the ability to work with people to develop a vision - rather than impose one - is critical. It was recognised that many engagements involve complex material and the ability to explain simply without patronising is crucial. Thus the research also indicates a shift from the professional as leader, to professional as facilitator, able to learn from and respond to others, both from within the team and beyond. Leadership skills remain important, but are not in themselves sufficient. Skills developed for professional and inter-professional situations, such as conflict resolution, need to be reframed when applied to community engagement. However, as long as the total advisory team is appropriately skilled, it is not necessary for each member to have full command across the skills; instead mutual support and respect with appreciation for each others skills, is key.

Enabling Movement up the Ladder of Participation
This research reveals that, to deliver on the empowerment agenda, higher level attributes are vital. The future question is to establish the extent to which these new skills need to be held by built environment professionals themselves, or be acquired through the acquisition of consultant services.

This research is one of 11 research projects commissioned from Universities across the UK, under the ESRC/HCA Academy Joint Targeted Initiative on Skills and Knowledge for Sustainable Communities.

To see how the HCA Academy is taking forward lessons from the research, visit:
http://www.HCAacademy.co.uk/

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Further details of projects, contacts and associated briefing papers can be found at:
http://gs.strath.ac.uk/suscoms

Skills Development for Built Environment Professionals

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Reflective Practice at Work

Key Policy Implications

- Practitioners in the built environment need to become more open to new ways of working and undertake Continuing Professional Development across a range of generic as well as technical skills
- Language is key in developing mutual respect and understanding between professionals of different disciplines and in their relationships with the wider stakeholder community
- Higher level skills and attributes will be required in order to deliver on the empowerment agenda
- Skills and attributes lend themselves to different styles of learning and development
- Professional bodies should be encouraged to test attributes for community engagement at the point of entry into the profession
- Professional bodies should encourage situated learning in education and Continuing Professional Development, particularly in collaborative and cross-disciplinary settings

Key Words

■ Generic Skills ■ Planning ■ Community Cohesion ■ Local Empowerment ■ Partnership

Background

Academic and policy reports have demonstrated that public participation in spatial planning is key to achieving sustainable developments and the Egan Review (2004) identified a range of generic skills, behaviours and knowledge required.

Professionals in the built environment acquire skills and knowledge throughout their lives whether at under-graduate and post-graduate establishments; through the process of professional registration and through ongoing continuing professional development and lifelong learning.

This research explores the extent to which learning opportunities to develop the skills and attributes for positive stakeholder engagement are available to built environment professionals. Educational and professional institutes, employers and practitioners are examined.

Approach

The researchers adopted the Egan Review (2004) as their primary point of reference and used subject benchmarks to generate a skills matrix highlighting the generic skills offered at each level of education within the architecture, planning, surveying and construction professions.

The generic skills identified by Egan included:

- Inclusive visioning
- Project management
- Leadership in sustainable communities
- Break-through thinking
- Team/partnership working
- Making it happen
- Process/change management
- Financial management
- Stakeholder management
- Analysis, decision-making & evaluation
- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Customer awareness/feedback

The researchers also studied the process of entering the building environment professions, looking at skills and knowledge acquired at higher education institutes and entrance to the profession. Subject benchmarks were assessed for inclusion of generic skills at graduate level. The system of viva voce examination or professional interview as a qualification for entry to the profession was also scrutinised for its strengths and weaknesses in covering and testing these generic skills.

Case studies explore a range of public engagement methods, highlighting skills development in a range of locations, policy environments, development types and scales. The researchers examined views from both professionals and community stakeholders of the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement processes and the skills of participating professionals.

Questionnaire surveys and interviews were used with core built environment professionals and firms offering community consultation services. The surveys identified differences in views associated with varying levels of experience and professions that were further explored through interviews.

Findings

Generic skills are evident in higher education curricula, but largely disguised or absent from the requirements of professional bodies

The findings showed little evidence of the explicit inclusion of the Egan generic skills into discipline or professional body requirements. However, emphasis on the development of generic or transferable skills is evident in Higher Education curricula and professional and occupational standards, albeit that these skills are contextualised within the discipline or in relation to inter-professional interaction. The review identified areas where the language used revealed habitual professional attitudes. These included prioritising the needs of the commissioning client over those of the wider community and describing communication skills in terms of 'presenting to' rather than 'engaging with' stakeholders. This suggests that there remains a tension between the model of the professional as a receptive facilitator and the traditional model of an incisive and decisive specialist.

Subject Benchmarks and professional body requirements define and ensure testing of a range of skills, but the emphasis placed on any one skill varies from profession to profession. Although most Benchmarks have been revised since 2005, the language in which they are couched does not provide an easy 'fit' to the Egan Generic Skills and most are contextualised to specific practice applications. Whilst this provides course teams with an ability to design differentiated programmes, it can reinforce 'silos' of knowledge and attitudes and lays open the possibility of inconsistent interpretation of standards. Skills development is not a matter of curricula alone. For graduates to be ready to engage with practice confidently, they need to be empowered through the way in which their programmes are delivered. In connection with this, simulation and situated learning are important mechanisms for delivery. Learning embedded in activity and a 'real' context is more likely to develop both self-awareness and skills development.

Graduates can increase their self-awareness and confidence through simulation and situated learning

At the point of professional qualification, a common practice of peer-professional assessment is used. This provides an opportunity to test skills in practice but, it opens the possibility of encouraging a culture of perpetuating existing practice. Beyond the point of initial qualification, although CPD is required by all bodies, there is no specific requirement for skills development. It is therefore possible for practitioners to remain at the same skills level indefinitely beyond qualification. The research could not, empirically, support or deny whether this is the case.

Skills in Practice

The research concludes that a clear distinction should be made between those skills which can be taught and assessed and 'soft' skills and personal attributes which are tacit and are best acquired through situated learning. Related to this, the research found evidence of innovative practice across the professions and at all levels of pre and post qualification education. However, support is essential to stimulate significantly more actions and to increase the number of situated learning opportunities in the delivery of professional education curricula. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) would need to provide appropriate, flexible physical learning environments. Professional bodies could encourage inter-professional and stakeholder engagement by facilitating collaborative learning partnerships with HEIs, practitioners and local authorities. The latter recommendation supports the conclusions of the Leitch Review (2006) which emphasised the need for greater employer (and individual) responsibility for developing 'world class' skills. Educational supporting organisations such as the Centre of Education for the Built Environment (CEBE), the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Homes and Communities Academy (HCA) are well placed to provide learning resources for Continuing