Non-formal Education
Неформално образование

THE CHALLENGE OF ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY NON-FORMAL TEACHING IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

Terry Price
Belieforama programme – Cardiff (UK)

Abstract. This paper is written by a non-educational professional and draws upon considerable personal experience (and that of others) of designing and managing learning based projects in communities that rely almost exclusively on tutors to deliver non-formal courses to a diverse range of learners with widely different needs and prior experience of learning. In some ways this remains a widely neglected sector within education across many parts of Europe when compared with the formal teaching of adults and children in primary, secondary and tertiary settings despite arguably facing the greatest teaching challenges. The paper will reflect on the reality for learners, learning providers and tutors and focus on the demands these make upon tutors and their consequent support and professional development whilst contrasting the reality of investment by Government and agencies in recognising and resourcing these needs and positing alternative ways in which it may be more likely to occur.

Keywords: non-educational professional; non-formal courses; learning; non-formal teaching

Personal background and experience

Although I have over many years developed considerable experience as a trainer and facilitator this is very much an ancillary sets of skills acquired in order to better facilitate the impact of project work whose primary focus is not in itself educational but requires high levels of participant involvement especially in exploring issues, decision making and setting priorities. My own professional background lies in social and community work and in particular the regeneration of communities that are disadvantaged or suffer socio economic deprivation. Improved life skills are an essential element in helping and motivating individuals to re-build the social and economic capital that is necessary in any vibrant and well-functioning community. The social work qualifications and background means I am well used to working with vulnerable and/or challenging individuals to safeguard and improve their life opportunities and personal relationships. It also included experience of attempting

to change the physical and social circumstances within neighbourhoods through community organising (Saul Alinksy "Rules for Radicals" and Tony Gibson "The doer's guide to planning for real 1998"). This combination of experience of both therapeutic and social models provides a good basis for making a broader informed analysis of how to change people's lives and solve problems. In present day UK, and in Wales where I largely work, front line workers are much more likely to intervene from either a therapeutic (statutory social services or primary health care) framework or a community organising/development perspective, with the latter having no real professional development training to inform practice.

For the past 17 years, I have worked exclusively in the community regeneration field, most of that time for a highly innovative UK charity, being invited into and working within some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. The approach taken means that the invitation to intervene has to come from the community, it is not imposed and is one of enabling community members to make the changes they want which may often be very different to the views of government agencies. This is particularly important in building long term sustainable change. Unfortunately, the UK has a long tradition of Government imposed regeneration programmes that often focus on infrastructure rather than people, are inevitably short term, demonstrates the principle that Government thinks it knows best and inevitably collapse when funding or political interest reduces.

The innovative approach at that time, since copied by many, was to seek individuals (often consider high risk by charitable funders and government agencies) and small groups from within disadvantaged communities, ask for their ideas to improve the community (both small spatial communities and communities of interest, non-geographically based) and back them with small grants (seed corn monies) and, unusually, provide a high level of coaching support to help shape the projects, develop their skills and confidence and broker relationships with Agencies and potential formal partners. Over 6,000 such projects were supported and many then morphed into larger scale projects as small projects, having gained in confidence and skills, were introduced to each other and given opportunities to work together. These projects were noted by both Government and charitable funders because of their very high completion rates and impacts compared to other project funds given to less risky community organisations. My organisation was very conscious of the need to evaluate why this happened and conducted research with the project leads (we called them Can Doers) into the factors that made a difference.

A considerable number of the early projects focused on (or involved) learning within the communities and a number coalesced into larger more complex community learning projects. That experience and the lessons learned attracted other delivery partners and indeed local and national Government and spawned a number of successor learning projects that I am involved in managing to the present. It also meant that I became directly involved in not only smaller local project but also national ones

within the Welsh and UK and then a number of transnational European projects, all of which increased the experience of a wider diversity of learners, learning provider organisations and tutors which I shall describe in more detail.

The growth of my organisation (and involvement in some larger scale national projects) also encompassed the expansion into managing not only community focused projects but also those involved in providing accommodation and respite for a wide range of more vulnerable groups offering residential and day centre support and outreach to individuals living independently – ex-prisoners, the homeless, people with drug and alcohol problems, victims of domestic violence etc – all of whom received one to one support from a named caseworker. Most of these individuals also had high learning needs but because their lives were so chaotic, they relied on a support caseworker to meet these whilst unable to cope in classes or small group learning situations.

This experience highlighted for me the many overlaps between the roles of non-formal tutor and support both imparting degrees of learning and personal support to the learner in different ways. This overlap in roles makes demands of a far braoder range of skills sets and competences that may be apparent at first and is something I will focus more upon when looking at issues of tutor competence later in the paper.

The Learner

My early experiences in community development necessitated the need to build people's skills as a frequent precursor to project development. Sometimes this involved coaching and one to one support but soon developed into the need to develop small courses. The problem faced was that very few learning providers operated in or with these communities who were outside of their normal delivery plans. There were many reasons for this (which I will explore later) but it meant that to fill the gap I needed to become a learning provider but one flexible enough work with many different groups of learners with different skills and needs. It also meant a period of trial and error in finding or developing a group of tutors willing and able to work with such a diverse set of learners and in very different and often challenging local community settings, away from normal delivery points. Some delivery worked well and some proved more problematic and it was important to evaluate carefully why this occurred and learn from it.

In the UK, at that time, delivery of community based learning was fairly formulaic, taking place through a standard group of providers at locations and with tutors and subject matter of their choice. Those potential learners that "chose" not to avail themselves of the opportunities on offer were deemed to be "hard to reach". This is a label still commonly used and an excuse for placing the blame and responsibility for lack of uptake firmly on the potential learner and no the provider. The majority of providers design and deliver course and learners choose from the menu on offer.

My own experience found that far from being "hard to reach" there was a great demand and take up of learning when offered provided the learning was tailored to

what learners actually wanted and asked for and took account of a very wide range of barriers that can make it both practically and emotionally difficult to do so.

At the local level, learners came from the most disadvantaged communities and groups, many from black and ethnic minority, refugees, asylum seekers or other economic migrant communities, those with low basic skills and income, the economically inactive, people in deprived neighbourhoods, the homeless and those in temporary accommodation, those with mental health, alcohol and drug issues or facing domestic violence and discrimination, single parents and older people.

What we discovered is not rocket science and that rather than just offer courses at convenient, safe locations, we also needed first take account of, and in some cases more fully assess, some of the issues that might contribute to non-engagement and retention.

Doing so meant offering a course(s), designed around a group(s) of potential learners in locations they felt safe or convenient, although often much more challenging for a tutor. Courses often had to be designed from scratch. Whilst using the term courses in this paper these were rarely advertised as a course addressing a particular basic skills but were more often activity or fun based using hobbies and issues of interest to learners into which improving basic skills could be interwoven. The trick as a potential provider of learning was to unearth these areas of interest and utilise them to attract learners – activities as diverse as sewing, cooking on a budget, family history, building and refurbishing computers or outdoor activities such as orienteering illustrate the wide range that could occur.

Social issues such as culture, religion, peer pressure needed to be taken into account; attitudes to some vulnerable groups their value and worth and factors of discrimination as well as emotional and psychological issues such as lack of confidence, instability, habitual behaviours, previous poor experiences of schooling, perceived failures, personality, responses to pressure and crises all needed to be factored in.

Once these were recognised it presented the challenge finding tutors who could work well in these situations and with such diverse needs. Placing a tutor, less able to work within these constraints, risked providing a poor experience for learners with consequent reputational damage at a local level as word spread. Rather than gamble, it became safer to develop and rely on our own tutors, many of whom showed a high aptitude to work with people, and a significant number came from within the targeted communities, starting as learners themselves, progressing to volunteers and then to paid tutors.

The smaller scale local projects, helped influence others particular in local and national government and being drawn into the design of large scale projects. Examples include the design and delivery of all Wales digital exclusion projects over a 10 year period, helping 60,000 plus people learn how to go online. Again the importance of working out what factors worked against uptake and acquisition of skills, tailoring

delivery to local and personal barriers amongst key groups such as those living in social housing, those on low incomes and with low skills, the disabled, older people, those with chaotic and vulnerable lifestyles allowed the development of a flexible programme tailored to local and person specific delivery. Apart from practical barriers issues of motivation, a sense of purpose in the importance of learning, lack of confidence had to be addressed alongside basic and digital skills.

Similar work with the TUC's Union-Learn at UK level focused on learners in low paid, low skilled employment and looked at adapting the lessons learned to encourage those in work to develop their learning opportunities both in the workplace (where employers cooperated) or at community locations nearby. This work and the guidance and toolkits was share in transnational EQUAL projects with Unions in France, Finland and Austria with the same groups of learners.

In parallel with this was another EQUAL project in which our experience was used to develop effective engagement with learners from within black and minority groups, refugees and asylum seekers and east European communities initially with delivery partners across Wales but in sharing the lessons learned and learning from organisations working with the same groups across the Netherlands, Andalucia and Finland.

Learning providers in community learning

Within Wales and the UK, I have worked with, and continue to work with, a very diverse group of learning providers that offer community (including non-formal) learning opportunities. When the work began most, with a few small local exceptions, tended to offer to prescribed menu of learning courses at chosen locations and those potential learners that did not respond were labelled "hard to reach" and not catered for. Budget cuts to the Adult and Community learning sector have diminished the role of local authorities (municipalities) as a funder, commissioner and deliverer and most large scale programmes (levels vary in the devolved Government areas of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and in England depending on the priority to Adult and Community learning) with delivery being contracted through tendering with contracts normally awarded to colleges, private sector and some larger third sector learning providers. This process tends to utilise funding formulae and predetermine some of the choice permitted within given parameters. These contracts tend to be large scale, and are won by providers with sufficient capacity to deliver, ruling out smaller more local providers unless sub-contracted.

The consequence is that many of the groups and individuals with greatest needs, that I have worked with, remain beyond the reach of the mainstream. This is partly recognised at Government levels with some limited reddress through targeted programmes. In Wales a number of Anti-Poverty programmes target those living in recognised deprived geographic communities or living below a poverty threshold, UK government targets those long term unemployed or economically inactive through a

work programme with strict eligibility rules, and there are a number of ESF funded projects targeting similar groups in Wales and other deprived regions. Some monies are directed through the Unions at work based learning and there are a number of digital inclusion initiatives.

More imaginative or innovative approaches that allow greater tailoring of approach, content or personal support to the learning usually occur through a small third sector organisation responding to a specific local need and seeking funds from charitable sources. My own project in the city of Newport is an example funded through a Welsh Government programme but building on earlier funds from a succession of charities. The outcome of this funding reality is that many very needy learners have no local learning initiative that could cater for their needs.

Where projects exist they are usually catering for an already perceived set of needs, have eligibility requirements and crucially are very time limited – three years being common – and thus prone to disappear regardless of their success when the funding ends.

The tendering and procurement processes used to fund the majority of larger learning providers have squeezed the flexibility to devote some of spending to non-formal community based learning. This means that a provider has to operate within tight financial constraints that pre-determine the delivery menu, setting not only the subject on offer but minimum numbers of participants, location and material costs, tutor preparation, delivery and support time. This tends to work in favour of those deliverers who minimise costs ie ensuring greater uniformity of courses offered, tutor costs concentrated on classroom deliver and minimal resources available to develop the skills of tutors or facilitate tailoring course to learner needs. It also means little is devoted to evaluating the quality of learning experience nor determining how effective the tutor is. Small scale delivery funded through charitable funding may be the exception to this rule.

Larger providers such as colleges will usually have recruited and offer fixed hours of work to many of their tutors and expect them to deliver an agreed curriculum within a set of operational constraints and be subject to an external inspections regime. However most also still rely on a pool of tutors paid on a sessional basis to deliver significant parts of their non-formal curriculum. Tutors will have gained a recognised qualification that acts as the benchmark to determine their suitability to deliver, the better organised deliverers will have managerial standards and expectations in place for internal controls and where delivery takes place on campus it is easy to monitor and support staff but this is not so where delivery takes place off site at small community locations and in isolation. Where delivery takes place in these locations it is more difficult and expensive to monitor and observe and support a tutor. Course monitoring systems tend to be more concerned to process learning numbers than focus on quality. Direct management and supervision of such sessional staff tends to be limited and infrequent with day to day contact, booking of work limited to emails or telephone.

As a manager of projects I found this process of arms-length management worrying because once set in motion, having picked a tutor to deliver a course it was impossible to know how well that delivery was going except for feedback from the tutor or perhaps one of the learners themselves. If poor performance was suspected it was difficult to evidence and often picked up in retrospect after the event because learners themselves were also very loath to voice direct criticism verbally to a manager or through a written evaluation form, collected by a tutor. Working in the many partnerships with other non-formal learning providers provided confirmation that almost all managers experienced and suffered the same concerns. This is compounded when most success measurements for a course and tutor tend to focus on shared goals across the learning group and relate to content and its delivery. This works well enough where the group of learners function well and bring few non-educational issues to the lesson but in much of the work I did with more vulnerable or demanding individuals the learning process is much more complex and depends as much on how well individuals' other needs are managed.

Apart from knowing a tutor has a recognised qualification there was no easy way to know if a particular tutor might cope with a set of individual learners other than by trial and error. There are three separate things to consider in trying to maximise the successful outcomes of appointing a tutor to work with a group of learners – one is the complex needs of a group of learners, the second is the skills, experience and attitude of the tutor and the third is getting a good match between the other two. Over time a good manager begins to build a sense of their tutors strengths and weaknesses but only if they make some effort to reflect with both tutors and learners on what worked and what didn't. This is also compounded in the non-formal sector where many managers lack an educational background and often have a project management background. Even in largely educational organisation, managers are often former tutors elevated to manage but with little preparation to do so. Thus in the non-formal sector many colleagues appeared to lack a framework for doing this and tended to learn only when things went noticeably wrong. Rarely did they understand why this occurred but if it did, especially on more than one occasion, the solution was likely to stop offering the tutor new work rather than challenge or question performance.

Tutors

In the Adult and Community Learning (including non-formal) sector, I have experienced, many tutors lack fixed hours of work and will operate as part of a pool of sessional staff for a given learning provider. They are used on a needs basis to deliver certain courses as and when demand occurs. It is common for tutors to be registered with more than one learning provider to obtain the level of work they want. The hours of work tutors obtain or be guaranteed in a regular weekly basis can vary considerably. Given the funding formulae that govern most community based learning provision and the lack of resources for staff development, it is rare to

find employers devoting much time to their tutors' professional development. This is especially where a tutor may work for only a few hours a week or intermittently or where they work across more than one employer. The better providers appear to offer infrequent supervision and access to occasional professional training courses. However I not personally found a provider that attempts to assess in any detail what their tutor is good at, what their training and development needs are and those that aspire to this appear to lack any meaningful framework by which to do so.

This seeming absence of any framework to assess tutors and disinterest in developing tutor skills in many learning providers in the sector led to discussions with one of the major deliverers of community based learning in Wales (and by franchise the UK) and also with the University of South Wales who train youth workers and staff in the social care and health sectors for work with many of the learners groups already described in this paper. Desk top based research confirmed the anecdotal picture that once qualified tutors lack a developmental pathway to refine their skills to work with particular groups of non-formal learners with specific needs, mental health being one example, and we began to look at ways in which this could be addressed.

Discussions were held with senior officials within the Welsh Government's Department of Education (and their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland) that confirmed the perceived professional development gaps in this sector and lack of plans to address it.

Separate but coincidental discussions with work colleagues on a transnational Anti-discrimination project form Bulgaria and Spain indicated this to be a broader European issue. This lead to the forming of a partnership to investigate an Erasmus plus proposal to address the issues. This involved Universities from South Wales, Granada and Sofia researching and confirming that the UK position for tutors was reflected not only in Bulgaria and Spain but more widely across Europe. Although there are some sector skills measures (usually based upon and more suited to the formal teaching needs) and commonalities in initial qualifications for tutors there was little priority for developing a set of more appropriate measures or competences for this sector.

Both tutors and learning providers are caught up in a dilemma that whilst there are obvious gaps in identifying what a tutor has to offer based on an appropriate framework, preferably competence or capability based, there is little or no resource available to design or implement a solution nor any sign of likely future prioritisation of the problem. Given the tight margins in commissioned learning projects this problem remains unlikely to be addressed unless commissioners amend future contract proposals or new additional funds could be procured specifically for the continuous professional development of tutors in this sector or some innovative low cost approach can be found.

Given that providers have managed to deliver within expectations, continuing to win contracts, even though the performance measures tend to concentrate on quantity

rather than quality it is difficult to see any impetus for change from this quarter, apart from some smaller local providers. As non-formal education is relatively low in political profile in comparison to other more contentious education issues the focus of funders is likely to remain more on the formal sectors. This would leave the possibility of tutors themselves driving some change although needing to be supported through a special project and supported by some more forward thinking employers.

The broader European dimension

With partners and deliverers of non-formal learning, there was a growing awareness of shared issues surrounding both quality assurance and professional development of tutors. Non-formal learning often takes place in isolated locations and with groups of learners presenting additional challenges to the tutor of a support nature. Indeed much non formal learning can take place through support workers where learning is part of more general support offered. Without a means to properly identify a tutor's skills and experience it is difficult to match them with the needs of learners, often resulting in a poor experience for both, limiting the impact of any attempted learning. Yet non-formal learning is often a crucial first step in bringing new learners into the more formal world preparing for employment and greater involvement in society. It can be a more challenging learning environment than many formal settings but receives little formal support in comparison and is usually overshadowed by, and forced to fit, the requirements set for the formal sector.

The literature bears this out. "Informal learning is often seen as a precursor to the more formal arrangements of further and higher education" (Smith, 2008). Such arrangements see the competencies expected for tutors and their ability to deliver to diverse audiences as being akin or similar to those competencies within the more formal sectors. Yet, literature suggests that there is a distinct difference between the two (Smith, 1999, 2008; Coffield, 2000; Leadbetter 2000; Hogan, 2013) showing, as it does, that the arrangements for both formal and non-formal education separate with informal learning remaining the poor relation whereby competencies (ibid) which centre more on engagement outside of curriculum such as pastoral support and values are less recognised.

As Smith (1999, 2008) shows, there remains an over-concern with institutional setting or sponsorship, curriculum design and formal qualifications – as against process and content, support and guidance which means too that the competencies for informal learning – those required by the informal tutor – are more likely to remain excluded both from practitioner and policy discussion and from evaluative frameworks (Hogan, 2013; Walker, 2005). The competency frameworks which do exist seem to centre around more formal, progression into mainstream learning levels (Coffield, 2000, P.1)

That this is not just a UK issue is illustrated by the work of Buiskool and Broek (Journal ACE 2013) of the Netherlands which shows it is a common problem across

Europe. “Professional development and improvement in the quality of adult learning staff has been recognized as a priority at a European level. However, at European and national levels there is no clear view on the standard competences needed to fulfil the professional tasks in adult learning. In some European countries competence profiles and standards for adult learning staff have been developed and implemented, while in others standards are lacking. Overall, there is a need for more comprehensive research on this issue with a view to identifying competence needs for those working in the adult learning sector”.

What the work of Jeffs & Smith (2011) and Leadbeater (2000) highlights is the distinctness of non-formal learning in its own right, its often ad hoc delivery nature to engage learners often deemed “hard to reach” and the importance of self-awareness of values and facilitation skills.

The situation is compounded by the absence of resources set aside to cover any form of competence development or CPD in the funding arrangements for non-formal delivery. Tutors often work for more than one employer and many employers are small organisations. There is neither the will nor the strategic oversight to address this without an external intervention.

As partners, we have undertaken extensive literature searches looking at the situation regarding competences in the non-formal sector in general terms and find very little evidence of any competence frameworks constructed with this sector in mind, there are some attempts to fit non-formal needs into a more standard formal model usually related to EQF at levels 5/6/7.

Coffield (2000) elaborates on this and speculates on whether “the complexities of setting competencies for what might be ad hoc community/informal engagement may be another reason for the lack of a nationally recognised framework at these levels” whilst Smith (2008) goes further and suggests that this is no easy task as “Competence in a field depends on our abilities to both name and explore what could be described as ‘tacit knowledge’, and to ‘unthinkingly’ make use of it in appropriate circumstances” Such tacit knowledge of the role, purpose and the challenges of working in communities of learners in non-formal community settings is paramount in understanding how the educator, who can often be working in isolated locations where the tutoring and support roles required often overlap is to be able to self-assess and develop key competencies in line with each community’s needs.

Buiskool (Rationale above) bases his paper in part on the outcomes of a study carried out by an international research group in 2009–2010 under the guidance of “Research voor Beleid” under contract of the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) and cross referenced to the EC’s Action Plan on Adult Learning in 2007 and the Lisbon Strategy, complicated by the very diverse market within which it takes place.

The only notable attempts we discovered that tried to address these issues in part were the REAL project led by the University of Stirling and the Flexipath toolkit

developed by the DiE – German Institute for Adult Education – but both tend to try to fit non-formal needs into existing frameworks – Flexipath at a higher education management level EQF 6/7 and REAL on tools that will help a tutor evidence and reflect upon their work. There are useful elements in both that could be utilised in developing a framework. There are also opportunities afforded in Wales and Bulgaria to cross reference ideas with those aimed at continuous professional development (CPD) and competence in corresponding formal systems.

Perceived gaps and how to address them

Apart from an initial teaching qualification of some kind (these can vary from education degree to short courses such as PTLLS (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) or its successor AET (Award in Education and Training) which is offered across the UK) the tutor possesses no other widely recognised means of demonstrating acquired experience to an employer of their capability to deliver what is required, other than supplementing the qualification with references or word of mouth endorsements. References will usually lack the detail and rigour needed to provide an accurate picture of their capabilities.

Prior to assigning a tutor to work with a given group of learners with clear non-educational needs there is no reliable, structured means for knowing what the tutor can do nor what they might experience difficulty coping with and require support to do well. This is particularly problematic in the non-formal sector where it is often necessary to deliver basic skills learning layered within activities or fun events which can be more demanding for the tutor than formal teaching of those skills.

In my view there is a need for a specific framework to reflect professional progress for tutors in non-formal settings which should not only make it easy to establish existing competences but could also act as a personal development tool. Indeed it could identify new areas for development and learning, especially illustrating their ability to cope in more challenging settings.

For such a framework to serve as a tool for professional development as well as a statement of existing competence suggests it should be organised with different levels showing movement from inexperience to the highly experienced to match different complexities of teaching task. This would also provide a means for those non-education professionals otherwise good at working with some of these learner groups to develop skills as a tutor.

All the existing frameworks reviewed ,including national frameworks and a couple of innovative projects (REAL and Flexipath) funded through Erasmus, tend to focus more on purely educational factors for formal learning and are less suited to the demands of non-formal delivery to very diverse and often needy or vulnerable groups of learners in more isolated community settings.

There is a need to develop a suitable framework that looks at the broader set of skills and experiences a non-formal tutor needs. We felt his would be best suited to

a competence based format that is able to show how a tutor progresses or develops over time.

The inevitable question to ask focuses on what other areas of competence apart from the more obvious needed to plan and deliver courses to learners are important to develop or demonstrate to successfully work in these non-formal settings and with typical groups of learners. These would appear to fall broadly into three categories:

– A practical set that understands the nature of a particular groups of learners and their lifestyles and issues and the skills to deal with often challenging behaviours, chaotic lifestyles, attitudes to learning, motivation and confidence and the barriers to be worked with and to deliver learning skills within activities and workshops more so than lessons.

– A set of that focuses on ethics and value set that can work with groups that often receive or trigger prejudice and discriminatory attitudes from others. Tutors need to recognise and work with their own responses and those of others and be comfortable working with these groups.

– The third is the greater need to respond to changing circumstances and the unexpected with a greater emphasis on reflective practice, learning and adapting materials, approach, content and delivery the reality of setting and group and delivery skills that become much more facilitation oriented to react to challenges.

In our work we listed and organised a wide list of potential competences, drawing from known frameworks, adding our own and managing reduce, refine and group into six manageable sets to test with tutors and employers:

– Practical Organisational Skills that focus on preparation, planning and recording lessons

– Communicating and Relating that focus on inter-personal and group-work skills, motivation and learner support.

– Core values of professionalism, ethics and discrimination and learner involvement.

– Lesson delivery focused on knowledge, content, teamwork, learning/teaching styles and adaptation/ facilitation.

– Quality focusing on measurement, evaluation and adapting

– Personal development and self-improvement

When trying to group competences together into these sets, the main rationale used has been to group on the basis of future ease of access to learning materials and development tools.

It is important that a competence framework should be much more than a simple measure of a tutor's ability but should also serve as a means of promoting their own professional development. It should indicate how well you do things and help identify what needs to improve and how that might be achieved. That would mean incorporating some form of development planning tools within its design. To encourage use, a framework would need to be easy to use – being concise and clear

and attractive in style. None of the educational competence frameworks reviewed met these criteria, they were unappealing in style and some were quite off-putting, making it necessary to look elsewhere for inspiration and ideas. Looking beyond the educational sector at other quality assurance styles there are some aspects of the PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance for Small Organisations) model that could answer issues of style, attractiveness and ease of use if combined with a set of specific competences for the non-formal sector. It has the added benefit of offering a progression through different levels allied to a development planning process.

In considering the design and style of any framework it is important to look at the reality of the employment world within which many tutors operate. Despite the need to have a framework employers should use, are they the most likely to do so given the current lack of funding for tutor professional development and the sessional employment patterns offered to many tutors? To compound matters, tutors often work for multiple employers.

An alternative would be to adopt a self-assessment approach whereby any competence framework and development tools can be managed and completed by tutors themselves as well as used by employers. Tutors could assess and score themselves, identify their developmental needs and/or do this in conjunction with peers or an employer. If modelled on the PQASSO approach tutors would gather evidence of current and prior experience and cross reference this in support of their abilities for each competence. Typically this would become a portfolio that builds through their career.

If this approach to self-assessment is adopted, and tutors take on responsibility for their own continuous professional development of recognised competences their ability to do so will be determined in large part by their ability to source suitable materials and tools to extend their knowledge. This can be done through internet and library searches but that merely opens up extensive choice without any quality guarantees on its usefulness and accuracy. Ideally the best and most effective choices would be gathered by more experienced tutors and placed in a readily available repository with reviews and comments to aid choice – like the open source movement in the IT world.

The ideas proposed within this paper still need further work on design and concept for road testing and refined into a working model. The unanswered questions remain on who would do this and how would it be resourced?

NOTES

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✉ **Mr. Terry Price**
Belieforama programme
Cardiff, United Kingdom
E-mail: terrypricescarman@gmail.com