

Tom Maher, Chairman

Launch address

8th October 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen thank you all for coming once again.

This evening is, for some of us a significant one when practitioners in the UK's tutoring industry are coming together to launch their own industry body for the first time. A body that we hope will go on to be a responsible and representative voice for the UK's tuition industry. Launching an industry body is never that easy. It requires practitioners to look up from their everyday routines and make time available to reach out, in many cases to their competitors and work together to form an industry voice.

It has been particularly difficult for the tutoring sector to get an industry body off the ground as it is a highly diverse industry where many of the practitioners are very independent-minded and geographically spread out and the sector consists of a multitude of practitioners. This evening while we are here in this room, there are many thousands of tutors going about their work helping pupils right across the UK. A routine I am personally very familiar with while I tutored in my spare time when I was an economics classroom teacher. These tutors are not a clandestine bunch. They are simply quiet, thoughtful and frequently atomised. Indeed most of them would appreciate a bit of recognition.

The UK tutoring sector is booming and has been for at least the last decade. There is no evidence that this boom paused for breath for the great recession of 2007/08 and it would appear that we are going from strength to strength. It's a brave statistician who tries to put precise figures on the number of private tutors in the UK but suffice it to say that it exceeds the number of doctors, nurses, dentists, accountants, architects and dare I say it even chimney sweeps and farmers, all of whom have their own industry body. So why not us?

It's an equally brave soul who tries to state with any authority what is really driving the growth of our industry. Many of the people in this room this evening are very familiar with this market and so I am not going to try and delve into this too much. What we all know is that the surge in private tuition is a global phenomenon and that the UK tutoring sector is in a unique position with the English language, and its proximity to world class schools and universities to contribute to help maintain the UK as a centre of educational excellence in this competitive global environment.

Changes in communication technology also provide us with opportunities to innovate and extend our reach. The UK tutoring sector is a highly dynamic place to be right now. Even media companies like News International and Pearson are entering it which is fine and let's hope their coverage of our industry will not be too distorted by this.

THE TUTORS' ASSOCIATION

While tutoring is a buoyant industry, thankfully it's not a brash one. Most of the practitioners are genteel, accommodating, flexible and above all caring. The secret to our success is that we listen and try to address peoples' individual circumstances. Sociologists and focus groups might want to put us all in social categories but the tutoring sector just listens to what individual pupils and families have to say

My own personal experience of being tutored back in Ireland was when I was 9 years old by Ms Hughes the local librarian. Ms Hughes was in many ways a typical tutor. She was a quiet self-effacing bookish woman. To regulate the Ms Hughes of this world out of tutoring children would be preposterous. It would also be damaging to children and deeply unpopular with families. Equally an industry body (no matter how well-intentioned) needs to be careful to not introduce clumsy criteria that would marginalise the Ms Hughes of this world. So just as the tutoring industry listens to pupils and their families, the Tutors' Association too needs to be a listening organisation especially in the first couple of years.

That is why we have set membership criteria and codes of practice that are practical and are common sense. At the heart of the approved selection and vetting procedures are measures to safeguard children and to set minimum standards for tutoring companies and freelance tutors who operate under the Tutors' Association umbrella. Tutoring companies and individual tutors will be expected to adhere to these rules and Codes of Practice. Members of the public will have recourse to a complaints procedure.

In the first two years, we envisage that the association will be very much in listening mode as we get to know our own industry better and open up closer links with schools, the media and parents groups such as Mumsnet and the Womens' Institutes. It will be a year of bridge building. We could well then adjust our membership criteria in light of these consultations to see what we can do to reassure pupils and families and give them further confidence in the services we provide.

As regards dealing with our political representatives. I would hope that we will always be a dignified low maintenance outfit. If governments need help and wish to put our services to good use in order to target raising educational standards of certain groups of pupils, such as with the Pupil Premium Scheme say, we are here, energetic, not doctrinaire and happy to oblige.

At the outset, I said it is always difficult to set up an industry body. We are all busy and caught up with our own activities and work. These bodies have to start somewhere and I hope you will allow me to give credit to certain people. We would not be in this room tonight if James Croft of CMRE and Mylene Curtis of Fleet Tutors did not set this particular ball rolling. They were then later joined by Knowledge Seekers, Harrison and Allen, Carfax and Enjoy Education. We have also been extremely well advised by Chris Lenton of Lenton Associates and Alex Blackburn. However, I think it is abundantly clear that while Founders get to write the introduction and perhaps even the opening chapter, how this story eventually unfolds will be decided by the membership.

THE TUTORS' ASSOCIATION

As far as recruiting members are concerned, the signs so far are encouraging: large franchises, tutoring companies and individual freelance tutors have all signalled their intentions to join. What is pleasing too is that our membership will reflect the dynamics and diversity of our industry. Provided this recruitment of members continues at a decent pace, it is envisaged that nominations for the Association's board will be called probably around May/June with elections to be held by the end of the year. This board will then step down and the next chapter commences.

As a board, we are very conscious that this is only the end of the beginning and after tonight a process whereby the members begin to run The Tutors' Association commences. And finally, while how this Association will ultimately develop only time will tell. On behalf of the present board we would hope that this Association of ours is an open, welcoming, outward-looking, dignified and responsible organisation. And it's on that basis we encourage you to join.