More Than Measurement

Assessing quality through reflection in faith-based social action

Adam Dinham
Doreen Finneron
Steve Summers
Jane Winter

MORE THAN MEASUREMENT
ASSESSING QUALITY THROUGH REFLECTION IN FAITH-BASED SOCIAL ACTION

ADAM DINHAM
DOREEN FINNERON
STEVE SUMMERS
JANE WINTER

Contents

Acknowledgements

More than measurement: articulating faith-based social action

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are one of the largest and most swiftly growing contributors in civil society and the Third Sector. Yet resources available in the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS) to support them have not been widely taken up in faith-based settings. This may inhibit their ability to contribute and obscure the considerable role played by faith-based social action.

There are three main reasons why faith-based settings have engaged less with wider support resources:

- first, faith communities do not necessarily think of themselves as part of the wider sector and are therefore unaware of networks and support services that are available, including policies and procedures for legal and regulatory compliance
- second, they are sometimes nervous of losing their independence or compromising their values if they engage in partnerships and contractual relationships with public bodies. Conversely public and voluntary sector networks are sometimes wary or suspicious of engaging with faith communities because they have anxieties about proselytisation
- and third, faith-based organisations are sometimes unaware of appropriate quality standards and processes that demonstrate values, impact and organisational systems, or they are uncertain about how to choose or access them.

Articulating what faith-based projects do in civil society is crucial if they are to be understood and valued. The impetus to 'measure' for this reason is well established. But measurement is usually associated with simple, static, numerical descriptions of outputs or impacts. This constrains an understanding of what faith-based projects do to simply showing a moment or proving value to key audiences such as funders or policy-makers. Our starting point is that measurement can be much more than this. It is capable of enabling organisations to assess their work reflectively and continuously, in a cycle of change and development.

We report here on a process to test this out in faith-based situations. We implemented a mainstream quality assessment tool called VISIBLE (operated by Community Matters) in seven faith-based settings and reflected on the process to ask two key questions:

1 **Do faith-based settings use reflection when assessing their action?**

2 **Do mainstream tools articulate value in faith-based settings or are new, distinctive tools required?**

The aim of the project is to ensure that an effective quality standard tool is available to faith-based settings by establishing what elements of an existing mainstream tool work, and making adaptations if necessary.

I

Seven projects participated from across four faith traditions and a multi-faith group. They are located in the North West, Midlands, London and South West. They have a variety of organisational and management structures: some are charities, and some used the process to prepare for charitable status.

Between them they offer a range of community support and all are inter-generational. All except the multi-faith one are located in faith buildings. The process was overseen by a programme manager employed by Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN), to whom projects had constant access. Each also had a mentor provided by FbRN, as well as access to Community Matters resources.

The Policy Context

Measurement is important in the current context because faiths have been re-emerging in the public realm[1] in three arenas: as providers of welfare and social services; as contributors to 'community cohesion' through social capital, or as detractors from it through radicalism and violent extremism; and in extended forms of participatory governance such as neighbourhood management.

However, policy constructions of public faith have been criticized in several ways:

- first, for instrumentalizing faith communities, treating them primarily as deliverers of services that government policy needs, with potentially damaging consequences to the communities themselves. Alongside this, faith communities themselves have been questioned on grounds of overstating their resources

- second, for enlisting faith communities to policy goals which narrow their ambitions for social change

- third, there are debates about the differing capacities and amenabilities of faith communities to deliberate their roles, and manage differences and dissent. Put simply, some are better than others at debating the shape and content of their actions

- fourth, there are differences in organisational and congregational approaches between faith groups and traditions which make it more possible for some than for others to produce and field representatives and leaders in the sorts of policy structures and practices to which they are called. For example, a Church of England Bishop may be better resourced to take a seat on a partnership board than a voluntary Imam. The infrastructures of faith communities affect their 'deliverability' to public policy

- fifth, some argue that faiths have developed a privileged position which is unwarranted and unfair – if faith groups are invited to the public table, then why not other belief groups and associations? Linked to this are questions about the distinctiveness of the faith contribution. What added value do faiths provide that merits their inclusion in the public realm?

- sixth, governments tend to engage with the more visible representatives of the majority faiths, and this risks sidelining minority members and smaller traditions.

The public role of faiths has also proved controversial because it is seen as moving faith from the private sphere back in to the public realm from which, it had been assumed, Enlightenment processes had banished it. This has moved some sociologists to contemplate the 'desecularization' of the West.[2]

---

1   Dinham et al., 2009
2   Berger, 1996

3

More generally, there is criticism of 'community' having been hijacked as a vehicle of policy. Clarke and Newman have written in this context of 'the colonization of radical language'.[3] In the case of 'community', it has been argued, this means the rejection of Freireian 'conscientization'[4] in favour of Etzioni's 'communitarianism'[5] which recasts 'empowerment' in public policy terms which calls for a prescribed, rather than empowered, form of 'citizenship' behaviour.[6] In turn, the idea of the 'faith community' is itself criticized for colluding with an assumption that a homogenous 'sector' exists or can exist.

Nevertheless, faiths have a long tradition of working in communities[7] and there is now a highly developed policy agenda which recognizes and seeks to work with this.[8] This is likely to expand under the Conservative-Liberal coalition government (2010-) which is implementing reductions in funding for public services and the further extension of the mixed economy of welfare. This will include more private and voluntary sector providers, including faith groups.

This poses some challenges and opportunities. Key amongst these is how the faith contribution is understood, valued, used and demonstrated.

---

3   Clarke and Newman, 1997
4   A facilitated community process to bring to the surface the political disposi-
    tions and aspirations for change already inherent in people and communities
    in oppressive situations. Freire, 1970
5   Etzioni, 1993
6   Dinham, 2005
7   Prochaska, 2006
8   DCLG, 2009

Types of Measurement: quality, impact, outputs, outcomes

Measurement, though highly valued by policy-makers and others, is a contested notion. It is usually associated in narrow terms with 'counting' usefulness, outputs and impacts rather than assessing, learning and reflecting over time.

The Charities Evaluation Services provides a table which compares the different aspects of quality covered by different systems[9] and also provides a comprehensive review of twenty different tools and systems.[10] What is emphasised is the importance of organisations assessing which systems are most appropriate to address their own internal priorities for organisational development and also to meet the external demands from users or funders to demonstrate and improve credibility and performance.[11]

Ellis reviews twelve quality systems and categorises them into three distinct groups:[12]

1 quality standards that do not require information to be provided about service user outcomes in order to meet their standards. These standards, for example, Customer First and ISO 90001, focus on how things are done, the internal procedures and the quality of delivery, but do not require evidence about the results of the organisation's activities

2 quality standards that ask whether an organisation conducts effective monitoring and evaluation of the outputs and services it delivers, but does not ask about the overall outcomes achieved, for example, Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation

3 quality standards that require an organisation to show evidence that positive outcomes have been achieved (as well as also being concerned with internal procedures and monitoring and evaluation systems). These standards focus upon outcomes across the organisation, not merely the achievements and outputs from specific projects or pieces of work, for example, the EFQM Excellence Model which divides the sections into either 'enablers' (how an organisation does things) or 'results' (what an organisation achieves) with the underlying principle being that an improvement in the organisations' processes leads to better organisational outputs which in itself is as important a mark of quality as operating in the right way.

An alternative framework taking a much broader concept of value, outcomes and impacts uses the idea of 'Social Return On Investment' (SROI). This framework is based on involving stakeholders in determining the relevant outcomes and puts financial values on the significant social and environmental changes identified by stakeholders.[13]

9   Murphy, et al., 2010, p.27
10   Sanfilippo, et al., 2009
11   McCabe, et al., 2010 & Faithworks, 2008
12   Ellis, 2009
13   Nicholls, 2009

5

Other systems use more practitioner-based or theoretically-backed measures and focus upon 'distance travelled' rather than outcomes.[14]

There are many approaches to measurement and systems for doing so. A significant message amongst them is that possessing a quality mark is much more than achieving a logo. It is a means of ensuring internal practices are up to date and compliant; it can provide assurance for service users; it can support volunteer, staff and trustee recruitment; it can give confidence. Quality assessment is not a moment but a process and a continuous cycle of assessment, improvement and review is desirable.[15]

According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), quality services are those that are needed by users or a particular cause, well run, assessed and improved, shown to make a positive and measurable difference and continuously developed in order to achieve the very best results.[16]

However, a quality *organisation* may or may not provide good quality *services* and may or may not have an *impact* upon people, communities or other organisations, resulting in change expressed as outputs or outcomes.

This is an important distinction. Outcomes measurements observe overall changes, benefits, learning or other effects that occur in individuals and organisations as a result of services and activities provided by an organisation.[17] Outputs, on the other hand, measure only those tangible, practical products which result from action and not the process of achieving them. Of a wide range of outcomes measurement tools, examples include the Outcomes Star for measuring change when working with vulnerable people,[18] and the ABCD framework concerned with the long-term process and outcomes of community development.[19]

The Charity Evaluation Services (CES) attempts to synthesise the distinctions, describing quality as being about excellence in the way that an organisation is run, in service delivery and in achieving the very best results.[20] This stands in contrast to 'impact', which has been described as enduring, broad and sustainable and relating to the longer-term mission of an organisation as a result of a package of activities and services.[21]

While impact measurement is increasing in popularity, and economic impacts are more and more emphasised, this report focuses on measurements of quality which encompass the process and the relationships leading to impacts, as well as the impacts themselves.

---

14 Westall, 2009
15 Murphy, et al., 2010, p.23; Faithworks 2008, pp.64-67
16 www.ncvo.org.uk accessed 25/08/11
17 Ellis, 2009; Walker, et al., 2000
18 www.outcomesstar.org.uk
19 Barr & Hashagen, 2000
20 CES 2004, p.4, www.ces-vol.org.uk accessed 25/08/11
21 Church & Skinner 2006, p.5

This approach has been welcomed by those suggesting that it effectively surmounts the temptation merely to measure what is measurable, such as the activities and physical changes, rather than what is important, such as the enduring effects on people and communities.[22] At the same time Walker (see footnote 22) concedes that the purpose of collecting evidence of outcomes should not merely be to provide a report to funding bodies and to achieve a kite mark, but also to provide information for an organisation to reflect upon how appropriately it is performing and to what degree of quality. How does the measurement imperative play out in faith-based settings?

---

22   Walker, et al. 2000, p.13

Measurement in Faith-Based Settings

A quality system should clearly state the values on which it is based, and these should fit closely with the organisation's wider values.[23] **In faith-based settings, values may be held as beliefs and the relationship between religious belief and quality services is sometimes thought to be distinctive as a result. Others resist this view, arguing that there is nothing special about the faith-motivation of faith-based social action**, and no particular values which non-religious actors cannot also hold.

As with non-faith-based settings, some things about faith-based social action can be counted, for example, numbers of people at a luncheon club, but counting is not the same as measuring, even when we seem to be counting the same things. To measure social action there has to be a way of ascribing value to what is being measured, and this has to be capable of being bench marked against a standard. One distinctive question in faith-based settings may be whether – and how – to measure the 'faith-base' itself.

There are both internal and external reasons for measuring in faith-based social action. Evaluating what is done is an essential part of checking that expected standards are being maintained. Benchmarking, even if it is only internally against past results, shows where there is room for improvement and will demonstrate when that has been achieved. Thus, social action uses measurement and evaluation as a tool to help ensure quality and improve performance for the sake of those who use the services and the staff and volunteers.

Some faith-based organisations believe the base in faith and the high ideals of the organisation are proof against poor standards and even the possibility of abuse. This is obviously not the case as a number of high profile cases have shown. **The people who use the services of faith-based social action organisations are typically among the most deprived and vulnerable in society. They deserve the highest standards of protection and care. Only by measuring and evaluating can organisations give public account for the protection of their users and ensure they receive good services.**

Increasingly funders and partners are requiring assurance that the organisations they fund, or work with, are sound, use their resources wisely and have good outcomes from their work. It is not unusual for funders and partners to be even more wary of dealing with faith-based organisations than with others in the wider sector. However unjustified this may be, it is still something that needs to be overcome, and it may be even more important for faith-based organisations to be able to demonstrate their probity and quality thus assisting partners to find ways to overcome their resistance.

---

23 Murphy, et al. (2010), and Faithworks 2008

Using VISIBLE in faith-based settings

VISIBLE was chosen as the tool to pilot in faith-based settings because
- it is a quality standard framework specifically designed for small local community groups, such as those which are FbRN's constituency
- it holds authentic accreditation recognised widely within and beyond the sector
- its founding body, Community Matters, was keen to test the standard in faith contexts
- Community Matters is a trusted and established provider in the sector
- its principles and methods sit comfortably alongside the values of FbRN, especially collective action and empowering people
- Community Matters were open to adapting the framework for faith-based settings if that was found to be necessary.

VISIBLE is accredited by the Charity Commission, the Cabinet Office, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Community Alliance. It is a developmental tool requiring organisations to demonstrate legal compliance and accountable practices and procedures across a range of indicators. It also emphasises measurement as a developmental journey.

VISIBLE

The indicators require evidence of the organisation's ability to demonstrate:

A **VOICE** to represent issues of local concern
Community organisations provide a voice for local concerns and for people whose views may not always be heard.

An **INDEPENDENT** and politically neutral organisation
Community organisations are independent and politically neutral with a powerful commitment to democratic principles.

A **SERVICE** provider for local people
Community organisations deliver services to local people.

An **INITIATOR** of projects to meet locally identified needs
Community organisations initiate new projects and services that respond to local needs.

A **BUILDER** of partnerships with other local organisations and groups
Community organisations build partnerships with other local organisations and groups.

A strong **LOCAL** network of people and organisations
Community organisations provide a strong local network of people and organisations working together and supporting each other.

A way to **ENGAGE** local people to become active in their communities
Community organisations provide ways of engaging people to become active in their communities.[24]

---

24 http://www.visiblecommunities.org.uk/index.php?page=3 accessed 12/08/11

The VISIBLE process aims to:

- enable organisations to reach at least a minimum recognised standard (kitemark) and from there continuously to improve
- demonstrate to potential partners and funders the standards the organisation operates to, including assurance about equal opportunities, the appropriate use of funds and the contribution to cohesion in the neighbourhood or community
- assure users and participants in the organisation of the standards they can expect
- provide staff and volunteers with a clear evaluation of where they are and what they need to do to move forward.

To complete the standard an organisation compiles a portfolio set against indicators, some of which are compulsory and some self-selected. These are written in such a way as to require critical reflection on current practice. It is reckoned to take a minimum of nine months to complete, taking into account the requirement for the governing body and staff to be fully informed and engaged with the process. Organisations plan their own way of completing their chosen indicators, using an online workbook, and have no time constraint place upon them. None of the projects in the study were required to complete the standard within the research period.

Once completed, the workbook and a set of required documents are submitted for desk-based assessment. Following this an assessor visits the project for a full day meeting with staff, the governing body, users and partners. Successful projects are accredited for three years.

VISIBLE may be managed by a 'local licensed agent', usually an infrastructure body such as a local authority or Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), who buy a number of licenses and support community groups through the process. For the purpose of the research, FbRN acted as a licensed agent and allocated each project with a mentor providing support including policy drafts, online work book guidance, telephone calls and visits. This was to be a crucial part of the process.

The mentors were all faith-based community practitioners with extensive knowledge and experience of management and organisational practice. Mentors were appointed through an open application process. They were allocated to projects according to two criteria. First: the faiths (if any) of the mentor and project. The aim was to place mentors in organisations with which they did not share a faith. Second: the location, mentors were placed as close to their project as possible.

Mentors signed an agreement to join the project induction training, visit the project at least twice during the process, keep in weekly contact with the project, and liaise with the research team via the programme manager. The mentors had 'read-only' access to the VISIBLE on-line work book, and access to Community Matters resources through the project membership. As the work progressed projects and mentors developed their own working arrangements.

A note on methods

The project was conducted in a 'knowledge transfer partnership' (KTP) by the Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN) and the Faiths & Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London (FCSU) in 2009-2011. This KTP is part of the broader 'Taking Part' consortium of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners aiming to develop knowledge, skills and capacity for civil society (Third Sector) activity.

The original research to be 'transferred' was undertaken in two projects (in 2006 & 2007-08) which generated detailed knowledge about the value of faith-based organisations in community social action. The first comprehensively and systematically reviewed 'grey' research residing at regional and community levels across England to produce a national dataset of faith-based activities in social action.[25] This identified a problem with measurement at national level since each region and community level project was using localised and highly differentiated language and methodology. This inhibited comparability and the ability to communicate effectively between areas.

The second project, supported by the Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG), considered the potential for national indicators or 'domains' for measuring faith-based social action. These were developed using community development processes and values. A key question was whether existing mainstream approaches would be adequate or whether additional and/or distinctive ones would be needed.

We argued in an article (published in January 2011) that **the challenge is to measure quality in faith-based settings in ways which develop the activity rather than merely 'demonstrate' it or show it off. We argued that this is best rooted in community development approaches. We called this process 'measurement as reflection'.**[26]

By assessing the fit between VISIBLE and the seven projects in this study we have been able to identify which elements in this mainstream tool are useful in faith-based settings. This has allowed us to consider the relationship between faith-based social action and wider forms and to ask whether faith-based settings are distinctive or integrated. This has also allowed us to consider the extent to which adaptation of mainstream tools may be required. The process has intended to sharpen the ability to measure, and the rationale for doing so, while locating faith-based social action in the wider civil society context.

Working with the projects we carried out semi-structured interviews (n=18) to explore their experiences of using the VISIBLE tool, asking about its adequacy and appropriateness in capturing what they valued as quality. We also interrogated what the process implied for projects' own development. We used this to explore the degree to which mainstream tools, as represented by VISIBLE, would fit in faith-based settings to measure

25 Dinham A, 2006
26 Dinham A & Shaw M, 2011

quality as a process of reflection. We considered what features of the tool facilitated this 'fit', and which if any did not. We also conducted four focus groups with mentors (n=6), partners (n=4), faith leaders (n=4) and support bodies (n=4) to explore their views of the role and usefulness of measurement as reflection. An assessment of the fit between VISIBLE and these faith-based settings highlights continuities and discontinuities within and between faith-based settings as well as non-faith-based counterparts.

Measurement as reflection

We found that the main reason why faith-based organisations undertake a quality measurement process is to seek organisational development and the improvement of services in a process of reflection.

" *I would argue that when we get almost into a routine of doing that [reflection and evaluation] it certainly helps us from the projects' point of view but it may be something analogous with our own lives as people of faith and indeed as faith communities to begin to do that ourselves."*[27]

Reflective practice (see diagram A) is a common model in social action but using measurement to achieve it is not. **A main finding of this research is that tools for assessing quality are valued most in faith-based settings when they are also used to reflect.** This requires a tool which is sufficiently flexible to allow participants to determine their own indicators of value, at their own pace, and for their own clearly articulated purposes while remaining within the parameters of the mainstream accreditation process.

Reflective cycle
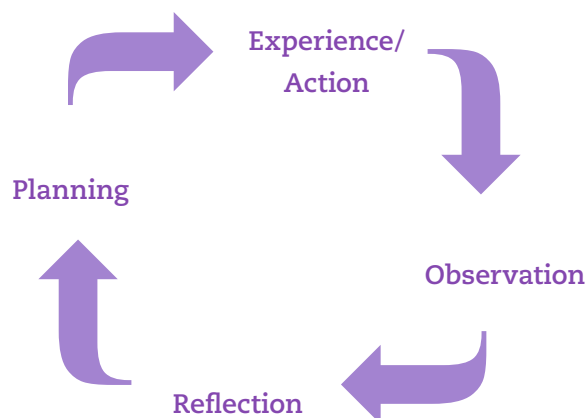
Diagram A
Adapted from Schon 1983
This method can be used 'in action' or retrospectively 'on action'.

" *If you're not looking at what you're doing then how do you know if you're doing it well, how do you know if you are doing it badly, how do you know if you are doing it right, that you should be doing it at all? All of those questions come into that, actually stopping every quip and flip. It applies to every part of life actually but particularly applies to organisations that are trying to engage with wider communities. Stop every now and then, take notice of where you are, take notice about what's happened and have a think about where you're going next."*

13

27   Quotes are unascribed throughout in order to preserve participants' anonymity.

Participants note a very important difference between measuring an organisation and measuring the activities of a faith community, since 'communities' are real spaces in which real people live while organisations are structures in which people work.

This makes communities spaces of solidarity and relationality, not simply organisational structures. Reflection on faith-based social action takes place in these contexts. Many measurement tools miss this by focusing on organisational performance.

" *VISIBLE definitely comes across as something that's got localised community groups at heart and it simplifies some things for you but without compromising the areas where you've got to get systems in place. So whether you are faith-based or non-faith-based you've got your community at heart; that is what really matters. It has not taken us away from our core values in any respect, so for example it's not purely about how to be organised better to ensure that you achieve your targets, it's keeping in mind targets and outcomes and all the other things that are important for organisations dealing with people."*

Participants stressed the importance of facilitative, organic, bottom-up, non-structural, value residing in the community of solidarity and relationship, rather than in an organisation, which may be incidental to the relationships which matter.

Undertaking this process encouraged projects to make space for such reflection, for example by introducing regular evaluation meetings involving volunteers and staff after activity sessions.

This measurement process also proves to be an effective means by which an organisation may revisit its values, redirect its goals, refine its policies and procedures and refresh its practices as part of a cycle of organisational change and development.

" *I wanted to instil within the organisation…that we have systems in place whether it's finance, management, HR or volunteering so that regardless of who is in the management team, they'd be able to open the booklet and say, hey, the information's here."*

" *All the projects were clear that the process had required them to look again at their values as well as the way they operated. They wanted a tool that would help them embed governance practice in the life of the organisation."*

Participants also said that faith-based social action is marked out by a disposition towards reflection in the forms of wisdom drawn from the faith and attentive hospitality; factors which they think aid a reflective nature and an expectation of transformation for individuals and the organisation.

They commented that seeking to welcome the stranger and to offer service as hospitality to everyone unlocks an organisation to be open to new possibilities and challenges from unexpected people and places.

> " *We are all one, we are all human beings and to me everyone is equal. All, the women, children, everyone is, even small or old, young, you name it, we are all same, we are all equal. We can't differentiate: he's poor or he's rich, no, there is no difference between any person. So a beggar, he can sit with us and have food, there's no 'no, no you can't sit here.' If anyone does that he doesn't know what Sikhism is, it's as simple as that.* "

In this way, faith connects directly to service. Reflection upon that faith is regarded as essential to renewing effective service.

Findings

Participants in the projects said that a quality standard is worth doing for articulating values, re-connecting with <u>passion</u>, affirming <u>commitment</u>, promoting <u>openness and transparency</u>, surfacing <u>tensions</u> and barriers and resolving them, encouraging participatory <u>leadership</u>, building <u>professionalism</u>, and for improving quality. They emphasised a reflective approach over and above one which confines itself to demonstrating value to stakeholders.

VALUES

This raises the question whether faith-based settings need a tool that measures and reflects the faith-base.

Participants spoke of their religious faith when discussing the values underpinning their work.

> *…fundamental principles of the Sikhism: first the services to the whole of mankind, if you're not providing them, then any Sikh fails to fulfil his commitment. It's not only for the Sikhs it's diversity for all communities."*

> *Service, that's the bottom line for us, it's service. So in terms of how it's reflected in what we do we started this project as a way of serving the community."*

> *I think that the way in which we approach everything from that sense that we are all human beings and we have a purpose to serve God, although we worship in different ways and we call him by different names. It is about that same human wish, if you like, to be together as one for the good of everybody and I think that's what faith organisations share with each other."*

Participants felt that this particular tool enabled their values and their relationship to their faith to be expressed and measured, as they hoped it would, even though it does not specifically ask about faith. This is a result of the flexibility of the tool which makes room for determining some indicators within projects as well as including many which are 'core'.

Some participants talked directly about God or religion when asked to discuss organisational values. Others referred to values such as service, hospitality, justice, tolerance, dignity, openness and equality. Participants were satisfied that this captured their values sufficiently and did not feel a need to use more religious language.

Some participants expressed caution about making any claim that faith values are different or distinctive to other forms of social action. They recognise that all social action organisations have a value-base and that faith and non-faith groups may share values.

> " *I am very wary of suggesting any faith-based organisation has qualities and values that are not found in other organisations because I don't think we have any particular claim on goodness, integrity, generosity and all that.*"

> " *I would certainly echo what is said about not making claims about values or ethics as though they didn't exist in other non-faith-based organisations where they can be just as strong.*"

Some participants remarked that there was little distinctive or unique in the values of the faith-based organisation they worked for but others said that there was a difference.

> " *faith values give an independence – we're not beholden to funders.*"

> " *a mixed group of staff/volunteers motivated by their different faiths.*"

What is also clear is that a faith-based value is not felt necessarily to require public expression. Participants talked about the importance of their faith as a value base for them, but not of the need to voice it publicly.

> " *faith motivation behind the work, the work of committed volunteers – cleaning the loos.*"

The measurement tool used in this study enables the revisiting and articulation of values for any organisation, whatever these values may be. The projects liked this particular model since it allowed them to reflect on values, including those deriving from their faith.

In some cases the intertwining of faith and action means that values are naturally expressed in practice.

> " *it's just about, I suppose getting us lot round here, 'cause I live in X, helping us all get on and that's what they [the project] do, that's really what they do.*"

Faith values are seen as capable of creating a commonality and shared identity.

At the same time, core values may tie a local faith-based organisation to its national faith body in ways which prevent it utilizing support from elsewhere, For example, the governance and employment regulations for two projects were bound by their national body.

Faith-based social action projects emphasise measurement which captures how values are put into practice. This study has found that faith-based organisations are satisfied with a measurement tool which can capture expressions of values in practice and provide space for reconnecting with those underpinning values. They do not require a tool which expressly recognises religious values in public ways.

PASSION

Nevertheless, linked to this is the extent to which 'passion' has featured in participants' discussions. The research did not set out to investigate the role of 'passion' and it has been surprising to find it brought up in the context of a quality standard.

Participants suggest that the measurement process provides spaces for reflection which help faith-based projects to re-sharpen their focus. They say that this, in turn, re-energises them and their work.

" *It's helped to give us a focus and some clarity on key issues around development of systems and policies so it's kind of helped to streamline that conversation into action for us."*

In some cases this is described as re-igniting passion. In others it generates new passions. In either case it refers to a deep emotional commitment underpinning the social action.

" *…what drives me, is my Islamic motivation to do good and to help others whatever faith they are."*

Measuring may be highly effective in reconnecting to passion but it does not in itself necessarily result in action. At the same time, participants said that a failure to take passion seriously may undermine the activity which is strengthened by it.

They also said it is important that they feel passionate about the quality assurance process if it is to be undertaken successfully. But they feel more passionate about the local area, about the organisation and the needs it meets too, and about the relationship between their faith and their service to others. Sometimes this is described as 'working out theology in practice'.

They also note that people feel differing degrees of passion about the measurement process itself. The research found that lead workers were the most passionate. They were the people who were driving the work and compiling the evidence.

Chairs of Boards were also passionate about the standard. They were aware of the sacrifice of time and energy it was costing to complete the evidence. Their passion stemmed from their faith motivation.

" *evaluating our work is incredibly important for perspective. You know you get so engaged in the work, that ability to step back to evaluate and to reflect [is overtaken]. I would say as well from a spiritual point of view, that's quite important because that is what God wants and needs us to do, to be able to step back a bit from our lives, to be able to see ourselves to an extent through God's eyes and get that sort of perspective."*

Service users and volunteers were generally less enthusiastic about the process. While they appreciated its value, they did not express passion about it.

This is challenging because the connected community will be one in which passion is distributed throughout. The reflective approach to measurement-as-reflection has potential to be effective in achieving this since it seeks to involve people widely and deeply rather than becoming a tick-box exercise carried out by one lead person.

Participants said that this particular process produced and released passion and enabled passion to be valued, expressed and rediscovered by trustees, staff and volunteers.

One interviewee talked passionately about her care for her work and for the project, as well as describing the renewed passion for her role within the organisation that she had discovered through this measurement process. In response to the question 'Do you feel that you have been able to convey the heart and soul of your organisation through this quality standard?' she said:

Yes, I think so because we've all kind of got different perspective on it really and I guess it's the way the whole organisation works, you get input from different people who are essentially volunteers apart from the paid worker, but we all have different bits of input into it and I guess being part of the project these different types of people have had a chance to input, so yes, definitely."

Another participant's passion for his work was illustrated by his emphasis that he would resolutely and faithfully continue with the organisation's work programme including completing the quality standard, even if cuts to the organisation's funding led to reduced staffing levels.

…so I had already said to myself if work finishes then I would continue with those specific targets [completing VISIBLE and fund raising] to make sure that the organisation is still set up so that when new opportunities arise we are there to take them."

Passion is different to enthusiasm, which may involve eagerness and fervour to get things done, but is more spontaneous and fleeting compared with passion. Rather, **passion was seen as deeply rooted, residing in the long-term relationships and solidarity of the faith-based setting.**

We value the people in community. We see them as real individuals and that relationship aspect feeds through our planning and delivery of events. It's not touching a person with information necessarily, it's going beyond that to touch them with an experience so that they will then develop as better people."

Passionately 'living out' faith through social action was felt to be as important as service to users in the local community.

For me, it's actually being true to what we say we are about you know. If we are to love one another then that has to come out in practical ways. I don't know of any other way of making it real than making it practical."

19

For faith-based actors in these settings, the passion of a faith-based organisation cannot be separated out from the context of relationships, identity and solidarity.

This challenges the common assumption that faith-based services must somehow neutralise or privatise the faith-base of their action. All of the participants in this study said that they felt it wrong to evangelise through their social action. Services must be 'without strings'. But they also said that their passion resides in their faith and that this could be expressed, for example, in promotional material, in such a way as to sharpen the vision and communicate the ethos.

COMMITMENT

The study found that commitment is an important theme for faith-based social action projects. This includes individuals' commitments to the local area over a long period of time, the commitment of volunteers, paid staff and trustees to the organisation, and commitment to the work being done and the needs met.

" *I've been in this community over 30 years."*

" *We have a lot of volunteers and those volunteers do what they do as part of their Christian conviction."*

There is a difference between passion and commitment. A person of faith's commitment to others, to the work and to the organisation is an outworking of their passion. If a person is passionate about their work then they tend to be committed to it, whereas if a person is committed to their work, they may not necessarily be passionate about it.

Volunteers, staff and trustees said they are highly committed to faith-based social action. In relation to the quality assurance project, they were much more committed to the process than to achieving a quality mark.

" *...it's taken me a long time to get, how it is, how it is we can evidence it always, and I don't necessarily see that as a bad thing, because I think sometimes you can be spoon-fed too much and I think part of the process is to enable you to think. It is not a box ticking exercise in that sense and so I think that is probably a good idea."*

" *...you may not achieve the accreditation but in the process you will have done all the things and it will still mean something to you. For me that wouldn't be a disaster if we didn't get the accreditation. I'll look back at one or two parts but we'll have systems in place that run through the whole thing."*

Participants also observed a positive relationship between commitment to the measurement process and commitment to the organisation.

In turn they noted a positive relationship between commitment to measurement and the development of the organisation.

" There is this balance where everyone recognises this is important and the reality of doing it is hard. We have to be trained and supported but the balance of it not being so difficult to do, that it is something that you want to do because it helps your performance and helps your organisation grow, is what we should be looking at."

Participants also felt that the process gained their organisations greater credibility and commitment from the wider community.

" Once we've got an accreditation that means something to a lot of people then people sit up and listen."

" It has definitely brought recognition from partners in having a greater level of confidence in us that we are working towards a system and over the past two quarters in terms of return forms for the council for work that's going on; I do state in there of our mentor visit and some action taken and working towards the targets."

" …one of the things that has come out of everybody from this…is we want to see this centre as a centre of excellence, as an example for others to follow."

" …when we…hopefully do get it, it will definitely bring that recognition because there are only so many organisations which can get it. So yes, it will definitely give us a mark above the others."

Whereas commitment to the organisation and its services is felt to be important, **it is commitment to the measurement-as-reflection process that is seen to result in development and change. Participants said that undertaking the measurement process helped them to build commitment to the work, to the organisation, and to continuous reflective measurement.** The more they did it, the more they saw its value.

Both commitment to service and commitment to measure are regarded as elements in improving quality. Where measurement tools are 'rulers', the relationship between measurement and quality is static. Where they are developmental and reflective, that relationship is dynamic.

REASONS FOR MEASURING QUALITY

The study shows that those associated with governance emphasise measurement as a way of demonstrating quality to policy makers and funders.

Volunteers and staff saw the priority as being to demonstrate quality to service users.

We asked: Why did your organisation decide to undertake a quality management system?

A To have a system for assuring the quality of all aspects of the organisation
B To improve particular aspects of the organisation
C To improve the quality of our services to our users
D To improve the outcomes of our services
E To bring people together to share their ideas for improvement
F To motivate people
G To attract more users, Board members or volunteers
H To show stakeholders, such as funders, how well we are performing
I To fulfil the membership criteria of umbrella or membership bodies about quality
J To go on improving over time
K To gain external accreditation

We then asked 'Why is it important for your organisation to use your funds and resources to undertake a quality standard programme?'

Least prioritised was 'to gain the quality mark'. Responses suggest that measurement is seen as a process of reflection, aimed at providing the best service to users. This is seen as anything but a tick box exercise.

Demonstrating quality to a whole range of audiences is nevertheless seen as important, even where it is not the first priority. A quality measurement process needs to respond to all these expectations.

Within this, faith-based social action projects thought that demonstrating their quality to national government was their lowest priority. They also

strongly thought that national government should pay for organisations to undertake a quality process. Participants said that this is because they feel there is pressure from central government to prove accountability and demonstrate standards. It is also common to make national government the scapegoat for pressures which in fact derive from across the civil society spectrum: it is least personal, most distant, and perceived as least available to influence.

We asked interviewees to rank on a scale 1-7 (1 being the most important) **Who should pay?**
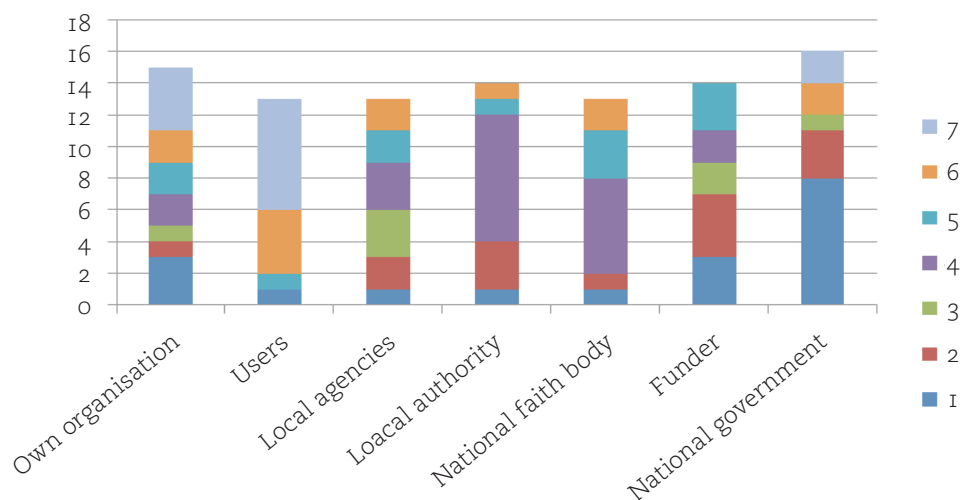
Participants also said that a supportive relationship with national government was very important in order to understand the policy contexts in which local work is taking place. They want to maximise their contribution by swimming with the tide where possible.

Some participants noted that setting out to gain a quality mark does not necessarily lead to quality and ongoing improvements in an organisation.

" *From my experience, just because other organisations have a quality mark and sometimes we go to work with organisations or partner up with them, and then in terms of the delivery it's just abysmal so you wonder how did they get that mark."*

Some said that they think an organisation's good reputation and the consistency of services it provides are at least as important as obtaining a quality mark.

" *I've got a Buddhist friend who says that since the centre has opened the village has been transformed. That's lovely; she lives in the village, and coming from someone of a different faith who uses the centre I think that's terrific."*

Overall, what was emphasised was being committed to locally based action which is focused on local need. This would underpin a quality organisation.

" *Oh people, you know, say you're part of the project, say that to anybody and they know who they are oohh yea they know who they are, 'cause like today I said I need to go down to the project and the boss just said oh fine, so yeah, don't have to explain everybody knows."*

23

OPENNESS and TRANSPARENCY

Measurement was also important to participants because of its role in making organisations transparent and therefore accountable. Participants said that clear systems and structures help stakeholders to get involved and understand their involvement.

They said that measurements should include the extent to which an organisation offers its services and activities to all, the experience of welcome and hospitality it offers, and the way it conducts its business in an open and transparent way.

" The doors open and they open automatically for a very good reason because we want everyone to feel welcome. So whoever's walking past, the doors will open. There's no judgement going on here. You don't have to worry if the doors will open for you, whether you're welcome in there or not because the doors automatically open. And for us that's very distinct, I mean we are saying 'you are welcome, you are of value, we will offer you hospitality, we will offer you God's love'."

This is also important so that an evaluation can be made of the extent to which both faith and secular values are respected.

" Well we are Christian we don't hide it. My feeling certainly is that everything we do, we do with love and hospitality."

Participants said that an organisation that receives funding has a duty to openly demonstrate its quality to funders, users and the wider community.

" I think they have a duty to the people who are making the donations to try, in terms of the quality of the services that they're providing and also the transparency, to show how that money's being spent."

Expressing religious reasons for faith-based social action may be an important aspect of 'being accountable' since it spells out why a service is being offered, who it is intended for, and what it might feel like to use the service. While participants were clear that services should not 'feel' religious, some felt that being explicit in materials about the beliefs and values underpinning them would provide a fuller 'flavour'. Examples are leaflets containing a Biblical phrase expressing a motivation, such as 'Blessed are the poor' or posters in the faith traditions' language advertising faith festivals.

In some cases there may be appropriate reasons why faith-based organisations might restrict services, for example to female Muslims or orthodox Jews who would not otherwise use this service and may have no alternative. Participants felt that such provision is sometimes necessary. But the approach taken by the quality tool used in this research only allows open-access types of organisations to achieve the quality mark (though restricted services could use it reflectively in other respects).

However, two of the projects in this study have very restrictive governance rules that means the management is held strictly within the faith council. They are still able to demonstrate their open-access and transparent approach by inviting a cross section of people to be involved in other aspects of the planning and running of their centres, and ensuring that the views of all those who participate are able to be expressed and heard.

Measurement tools in faith-based settings need to consider the relationships between local action and national structures and policies which sometimes compete in this way. A nuanced understanding of what motivates restrictive provision in some cases is essential and tools must be able to measure and evaluate it where appropriate.

All the faith-based organisations in this study said that this tool enables them to be transparent and explicit about what motivates them and why the organisation provides such services, without distorting their values.

This is a critical point because a lack of clarity about what motivates faith groups can be a cause of tension when external funders and partners are wary or sceptical of working with them.

We asked interviewees to rank on a scale 1-8 (1 being the most important) Who are you demonstrating your quality to?
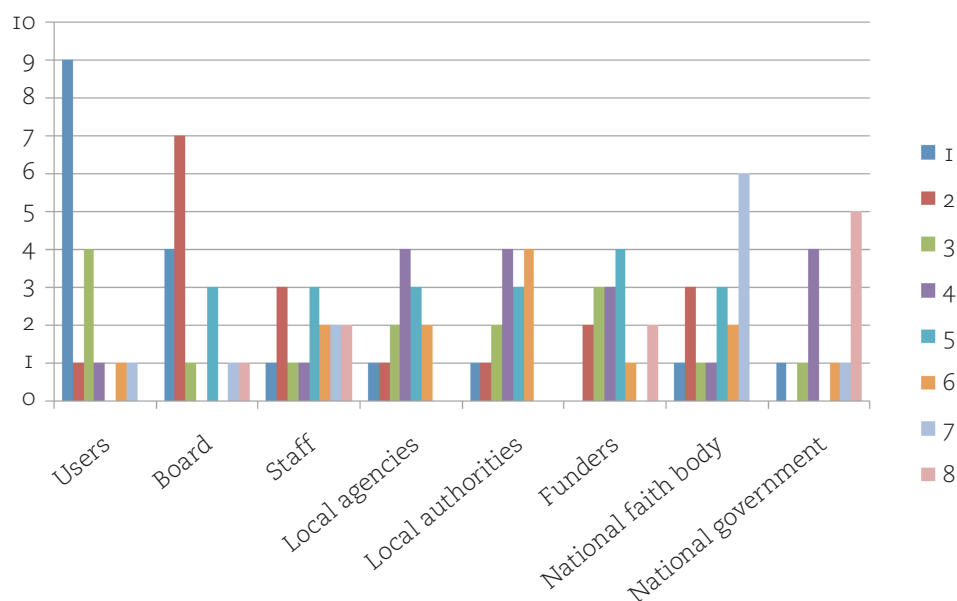
Participants also thought that another important reason for measurement was to demonstrate integrity, so that prospective trustees, staff, volunteers, service users, partners and funders know what a particular faith-based organisation is about and what it stands for. This understanding should be shared and available to all the stakeholders in recognisably similar terms. This is demonstrated in the clarity of governing documents, job descriptions, and trustee and volunteer induction, all of which have to be submitted as evidence in the quality assessment. This enables stakeholders to make an informed choice about what they are dealing with, whether to get involved and whether to invest resources.

Openness and transparency of ethos and values for the sake of others applies to all organisations, faith-based or otherwise, but there is potential for a particularly negative effect which excludes those 'outside' a faith group, when people of faith fail to make explicit their implicit faith values.

Some interviewees remarked that given the suspicion that faith-based organisations sometimes experience from funders and commissioning bodies it may turn out to be increasingly important for faith-based organisations to become more transparent about what they do, why and how they do it, as they tender to supply services.

If faith-based organisations can demonstrate their quality, including in faith-based terms, this may alleviate some of this suspicion.

Some of the projects remarked that it was important for them to explain their faith-based reasons as a matter of acting with authenticity. They felt that this particular tool allows faith to be articulated as a relevant aspect of service without evangelism or conditionality.

MEASUREMENT TENSIONS

The study found that an organisation may experience tensions between its mission, aims and values, and the requirements of external bodies. These can be constructively unveiled by the measurement process. It can also include internal tensions about the role of measurement.

" *We were beginning to pursue, and having to pursue quite aggressively because of funders and all the rest of it, you know the more generic quality assurance.... I was looking at the stuff with X, and all the stuff around clients and I wasn't sure it works for a community organisation full stop. I really got the sense that somehow it was running against the grain of our ethos."*

Participants also said that sometimes ways of working in a faith-based organisation, and how that is expressed, may not fit with the culture of these external bodies. Communicating across cultural differences can be challenging.

" *...there is something about our ethos as a faith-based project, that in a sense does make it really quite hard for groups like CVS to really understand what drives us and certainly you know government. Local government here's got a bit better largely from working with the likes of N, but you know there is still at its best, a reticence and sometimes a real distrust of the faith-based organisations."*

Some participants thought that external bodies often stereotyped faith-based organisations, sometimes leading to misunderstandings about services.

" *[Partners]...can't be at ease I suppose, that we can be doing what we say we are doing without some sort of other agendas attached, that they're naturally quite worried about."*

> " *I think it's actually quite essential because I think there is such a sensitivity around people's faiths and how they are presented and perceived in a country like Britain…*"

> " *I feel that they don't take us seriously because we're a faith sector organisation and we have to keep stamping our feet and saying excuse me, but, we're getting our outcomes, we're hitting our targets and we're bloody good at what we do, you know and that's the thing that sometimes you feel really angry with the corporate sector or the private sector.*"

> " *…we've got the word faith in our organisation…and we've been mulling over for the past year about having that word in our actual name because, for instance, when we go international, people abroad don't understand when they hear the word faith, they get quite sort of worried and pensive. So we've actually been thinking, do we keep that name or do we make it a name which people won't really relate specifically to faith because in terms of the activities we do, we know we're not a proselytising organisation or anything like that, but then in the UK, its worked really, really well, because people know that we are able to access faith institutions and faith communities, so we're still sort of mulling that one through.*"

Some participants considered faith-based settings may be perceived and treated quite differently to other settings. Although faith-based organisations may find themselves in these situations of tension, participants said that going through this quality assurance process enables confidence-building by affirming what the organisation is good at and what it stands for.

> " *We feel without blowing our trumpet we do focus on the quality aspect of what we deliver out there in the community.*"

In the end the measurement process can help resolve tensions by bringing them to the surface and confronting organisations and others with the need to address them.

At the same time this builds confidence to deal positively with tensions in relationships externally.

> " *I think the fact that it does show that we do have processes here, like these evidences, we do have systems. Things don't just happen but there are systems behind everything. Sometimes people might think that in a community organisation things just happen here and there, but you know there are systems for all the different things that go on here.*"

The study also found that there were difficulties and tensions around the allocation of resources by an organisation. A significant tension is between the impetus to measure and the impetus to act. Some project leaders expressed their difficulties with setting aside a regular time to complete the quality standard when their role already places many other demands upon them, both internal and external to the organisation.

> *...it was very clear when X got all the bumph that this was going to be a real big time commitment from her point of view. This wasn't a paper exercise that we just carry on doing what we've been doing and tighten up a few things and tick a few boxes here, you know it really was quite rigorous, and so there clearly was going to be a big time commitment especially for her but for others as well ... there was a resistance because I think you are so stretched you know board members, the volunteers and the paid staff."*

Another tension is between measurement for organisational development and measurement undertaken to 'chase funding'. Participants said that their aim is to walk a line between the two.

> *We have looked at Y (quality standard) and we have looked at another one which is a local one and central to a lot of funding that is around here, so it is a big player. I wasn't impressed with it. I didn't think that it was a journey certainly, I felt much more that it was a tick box exercise....."*

What was valued about the tool used in this study was its ability to enable faith-based organisations to reveal areas of tension and to work through and resolve them where possible.

LEADERSHIP

Participants said that a central issue in achieving measurement-as-reflection is how leadership is approached. The study indicates that even though governing bodies agreed to the assessment process, staff sometimes felt there is a gap between that and the practical support they need to do it. Trustees on the other hand said that they had total confidence in their staff and did not wish to interfere with the day to day running of the organisation. These competing perspectives are common in faith-based social action and can sometimes de-motivate effective Board and staff leadership.

> *More support from the trustees would have been the resource I would have been looking for which hasn't really come."*

> *Well once A [project leader] does it everybody does it."*

> *They (church council) trust..., and I think they agreed because they trust where we're going and what we're doing."*

Projects had previously rejected alternatives to VISIBLE because they were inflexible, did not reflect their values, and tended to be led from the 'top down'. Some were also regarded as more onerous.

Participants distinguished between leadership on processes (especially getting started) and leadership on values.

They also distinguished between leadership styles and leadership structures.

"…we try to be quite a light organisation bureaucratically. As a working class community that is one thing that can stifle and kill: to have too much paper work, too many committees, too much official organisation. A lot of things in a community like this tend to happen informally and I mean even with steering committee members, we have our meetings absolutely but a lot of the stuff gets worked out, talked about, discussed, debated while the kids are playing basketball among the parents, the mums and occasionally the dads."

This is a relevant point in a policy context for civil society which increasingly emphasises entrepreneurship and social enterprise. These are models associated with competition and business-like approaches as a driving force for strong services. They emerge from a determination to limit the role of government in community-building in order to make room for the energy and creativity which is understood to reside already in those communities. It sees previous more interventionist policies as stifling of this creative entrepreneurial spirit. Evidence suggests that this approach will work well in some circumstances.[28] But for others it contrasts too starkly with collaborative models stressing as they do the importance of services being generated in the context of relationships in communities. Policies for 'localism' and 'community organising' will benefit from this 'community' disposition. A concern is that pursuing only entrepreneurial approaches could squeeze out these collaborative contributions and deprive communities of the contributions they confer. Measuring – and thereby valuing – both will be important for the goal of strengthening civil society.

This is especially important because, according to our sample, a collaborative approach is preferred by actors in faith-based social action settings in communities such as these. Participants said that their way of working is collaborative, bottom-up, consensual, inclusive and empowering. The VISIBLE tool helped these settings to sharpen their focus on collaborative, community oriented approaches and to locate this within the pressures of changes in policy and practice.

An aspect of this is the confidence this tool gives to settings to make reflective self-assessment rooted in the community itself, independently of fluctuating policy contexts. They felt that this enabled them to return continuously to their core goals and practices and therefore to offer higher quality services.

Faith-based social action engages the local by understanding the relationality of communities and working with it. This relies on community development skills and 'bottom-up' facilitative approaches as much as on being entrepreneurial. The challenge is to synthesise relational community with an enterprising spirit.

What also matters in these settings is trust and confidence in the organisation's leadership from service users, volunteers and staff.

28 Dinham 2006

29

> *...we're able to listen and then through our quality processes show them that we have actually listened and we have improved whatever it was they may have had a problem with, or if we can't improve it for whatever reason at least be able to show them that we have listened and we've tried to remedy the situation. We are able to go back to them and say we've tried to improve this but unfortunately we can't because.... and it's always about being able to give someone a real honest truthful answer."*

What also matters is how assured a person is in their leadership role. Participants noted that sometimes there are distinctions between the perceived and actual leadership in a faith-based organisation. Individuals without particular training may still demonstrate effective leadership.

Participants emphasised how the approach taken by VISIBLE coincided with the model of leadership used in their organisation, how it enabled them to articulate their own leadership style and did not require them to change this way of working. Important elements are self-determination at local level, inclusivity which ensures the participation of people as widely as possible, and thinking of measurement as an aspect of empowerment: of individuals (who develop new skills and identify existing ones; of service users (who can better hold services to account); and the organisation (which is able to grow).

Success in measurement is aided by participatory leadership which distributes power and engages people from all parts of the organisation.

The projects apply organic rather than hierarchical leadership structures and have leaders who exercise facilitative approaches, who act as ambassadors, who draw out the passion in other staff and who are prepared to take risks to encourage the participation of others. This contrasts with a leadership style that relies upon an authoritarian or charismatic personality.

The facilitative style of leadership typical to the projects in this study coincides with a community development model of leadership. The measurement approach they choose supports this by providing a constructive framework which enables leaders to work facilitatively towards putting appropriate governance, management, structures and services in place.

At the same time, participants discussed the importance of having a 'champion' for the quality system to ensure that the programme is adhered to and evidence collated.

THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP

Another important part of leadership is mentorship. Participants in this study valued their appointed mentors. We conducted semi-structured reflective interviews with mentors (n=6) and further reflective interviews with participants in the projects (n=18). These showed that the mentoring role was felt to be essential.

" *I think they've [mentor and programme manager] been totally supportive because if you go to either of them and ask for support you get it."*

" *When we were still thinking about the process of the project becoming its own charity, you know that was a ten minute conversation that may have saved me days of research on the internet or with solicitors or whatever. In this field I just don't find that, that often, people who have really been around the block, know what they are talking about and you ask them a question and you get a very straight considered answer, and that's been really really useful."*

Mentors reported that their work had been harder than they had expected. This was because of:

- distance
- managing unrealistic expectations from the projects
- and not being able to give as much time to the project as they would have liked.

The mentors reinforced the findings from the projects that such a support role was very beneficial, and that taking a 'critical friend' approach worked best.

" *There's been more kind of chasing than I thought but they are actually getting there so it is a question of sustaining that momentum and I suppose making it more substantial but that took some kind of getting to."*

Participants concluded that mentorship introduces a chain of action which is essential to the measurement as reflection process:

- first, that measurement as reflection adds value, while measurement alone may not
- second, that the reflective cycle requires investment of time, will and money
- third, that **mentorship, as a key part of this investment, entails a relationship with a person in addition to a commitment to the measurement process. The mentor in a sense 'joins the community' rather than providing it with consultancy.** They hold settings to the task supportively
- fourth, that the 'learning disposition' engendered by reflection is underpinned by this relationship through discussion and supervision with a person who acts as an independent 'eye'
- fifth, that mentoring thereby leads to identifying, sharing and disseminating knowledge and understanding. This applies within the mentoring relationship, in the wider organisation, and potentially across civil society bodies between which mentors can move. This can be particularly important when transferring good practice between settings in different faith traditions
- sixth, that settings develop a 'thinking head' in a measurement process which is supported by a mentor.

Some of the projects in this study may have considered giving up without their mentor.

PROFESSIONALISM

The mentoring relationship is also part of humanising the measurement process, 'warming it up' and setting the 'professional' in the context of relationships. It is seen as an aspect of the hospitality which faith-based settings said was important to them. For this reason they did not link professionalism *necessarily* to a quality mark. They noted that being assessed as professional does not guarantee either a professional service or one that is well-experienced by service users. They wanted to stress the importance of relationships as well as processes. These are harder to measure.

Participants also said that **measurement can increase professionalism as well as demonstrating it.** They welcomed the opportunity to reflect upon their mission and purpose and find fresh ways of articulating it clearly. They also found this affirming internally.

> *Internally, my approach to quality has always been using it as a way of reviewing. If you are looking for a quality mark and using it as a way of reviewing what you are doing, then the mark in itself internally is less important than the work that it enables you to do."*

They noted too the benefits of having a tool that is available to measure and demonstrate professionalism in a context where faith-based social action is not always seen as professional.

> *It's important internally and externally. I think I'll start with the external because in many ways that's easier. If we are in the field of competing with others for services, for funding, first of all it gives us extra kudos really. It helps other organisations to see that we have an element of quality about us. I think particularly because sometimes faith groups are perceived to be amateur with the worst connotation that you could put to that, having some means of identification of quality means that you can counter that."*

They valued good governance, running the Board professionally and recognising the invaluable role of volunteers in policies and support systems. It is also clear that the projects were already highly professional in their governance and services.

They also emphasised the importance of allocating appropriate resources in achieving a quality mark and organisational systems and structures being put in place to do so. Although it is not necessary to be paid to be professional, **professionalism does require resources in the form of capacity for volunteer co-ordination, training and development, regulatory compliance, and recruitment and retention of a diverse body of staff, volunteers, governance, and service users.**

> *…systems don't just happen, we knew we had to put them in place and VISIBLE enabled us to do so…"*

Nevertheless **some participants noted the difference between becoming a more professional organisation and 'professionalisation' through which the project could become overly-formal. They felt this could strip an organisation of its warmth and hospitality.** There was resistance to professionalising for its own sake. One focus group discussed how professional accountability in a faith-based social action project need not be solely upheld and formalised through organisational systems and structures but rely as well on professional relationships and trust. This reflects the overall emphasis in this study on relationships in communities.

Conclusions

Faith-based social action can be effectively measured using mainstream tools. Tools for measuring them do not require adaptation. This suggests that faith-based settings are part of, not separate from, the wider voluntary and community sector.

The elements of mainstream tools which make them effective in faith-based settings are:

- the ability to determine aspects of what to measure locally, as well as to be held to core domains such as regulatory compliance;
- the requirement for distributed involvement in the measurement process right round the organisation to include governance, staff, volunteers, partners and service users;
- the requirement that measurement involves reflection on existing practices as well as thoughtful development of new ones;
- and the support of mentors in human-scale relationships which 'warm the process up'.

Tools for measuring quality in faith-based social action settings work best when they are also used to reflect.

The main driver for faith-based social action projects to undertake a quality tool is the learning process itself rather than the goal of obtaining a quality mark. Without a reflective, learning process quality assurance and measurement is static, not dynamic, and can lead to achieving the quality mark without genuine change and development.

Faith-based social action projects value the measurement process because it gains them credibility with the wider community.

Leaders and managers emphasise it as a way of demonstrating quality to policy makers and funders. This means that the learning emerging from measurement processes should be disseminated to stakeholders.

Volunteers and staff prioritise measurement as a means of improving quality for service users. This means it is important to involve service users in measurement processes.

Demonstrating quality to the whole range of audiences is important and a quality measurement process needs to respond to all these expectations.

Resources and support for measurement

An organisation has to commit resources to the measurement process if it is to be of deep benefit. It is an investment which produces a worthwhile return for the organisation. Resources include training for the Board of Management, as well as trustee, volunteer and staff time. It also requires a designated lead worker to champion the quality tool.

The support of a mentor is also regarded as invaluable for an organisation undertaking a measurement process. This is seen as an essential part of the infrastructure for 'delivering' faith-based social action to civil society requiring external co-ordination and support.

Faith-based social action projects are unable or unwilling to pay to undertake a quality standard. Some think that national government should provide funding for it. They may see this as 'quid pro quo' for 'tapping' the resource which resides in faith communities.

Measurement takes time. It is also a process not a moment. It requires a culture of organisational learning, rooted in the relationships in the communities from which services come. Ongoing measurement should be built into organisational management, for example as a standing item on the agenda for meetings and discussion amongst staff and volunteers.

Is faith based social action distinctive?

Faith-based social action settings do not usually wish to evangelise. Their aim is to serve in practical ways. Nevertheless, **measurement can help articulate the faith underlying faith-based social action.** This can be important for ensuring the work is well understood in terms of what it is, where it comes from and what service provision will feel like.

It can also defuse concerns about evangelisation and 'services with strings' by spelling out what is being provided, for whom and, with what reasons.

Faith-based social action providers feel that they are marked out by an attentiveness and disposition towards wisdom drawn from the faith and hospitality - factors which they think aid a reflective nature, an expectation of transformation and quality improvements. They value a measurement approach which captures and articulates this, because they regard it as valuable.

Faith-based social action flourishes through facilitative styles of leadership which coincide with a community development approach. These emphasise inclusiveness, participation and empowerment, which are elements of strong relationships and well-connected communities. A quality standard such as VISIBLE that is founded on community development principles will best suit local faith-based social action projects.

References and Bibliography

Ahmed, R., Finneron, D., Miller, S. & Singh, H. (2006) *Tools for Regeneration: Practical Advice for Faith Communities (2nd edition).* London: Faith-based Regeneration Network UK (FbRN)

Allen, A. & May, C. (2007) *Setting Up for Success: A practical guide for community organisations.* London: Community Development Foundation

Ashdown, J. (2010) Community action and faith-based community work *Crucible, The Christian Journal of Social Ethics* July-Sept 2010. Oxon: Hymns Ancient and Modern

Barr, A. & Hashagen, S. (2000) *ABCD Handbook: A framework for evaluating community development.* London: Community Development Foundation

Berger, P. (1996) *The Social Reality of Religion.* London: Faber and Faber

Billis, D. ed (2010) *Hybrid Organisations and the Third Sector, challenges for practice, theory and policy.* Hampshire: Palgrave

Charity Evaluation Services (CES) (2004) *Quality and evaluation in voluntary and community organisations, Guidance paper 3: key terms & definitions.* London: Charity Evaluation Services

Church, C. & Skinner, S. (2006) *Change Check: a practical guide to assessing the impact of your community organisation.* London: BASSAC

Clarke, J. and Newman, J. (1997) *The managerial state: Power, politics and ideology in the remaking of social welfare.* London: Sage

Cuppit, S. with Mihailido, A. (2009) *Demonstrating the Difference.* London: CES

Department of Communities & Local Government. (2008) *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society.* London: DCLG.

Dinham, A. (2006) *Faiths and Frontiers on the Starship Social Enterprise: boldly going as faith-based entrepreneurs.* London: FbRN UK

Dinham, A. (2007) *Priceless, Unmeasureable: faith-based community development in England in the 21st Century.* London: FbRN UK.

Dinham, A., Furbey, R. and Lowndes, V. [eds]. (2009) *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, policies and practices.* Bristol: Policy Press

Dinham, A. and Shaw, M. (2011) Measurement as Reflection in Faith Based Social Action, *Community Development Journal*; doi: 10.1093/cdj/bsq062

Dyer, P. (2006) *Code of Governance Toolkit: A Practical Guide to the Code of Governance for the Voluntary and Community Sector.* London: NCVO

Ellis, J. (2009) *Bringing outcomes into focus in quality.* London: CES Quality Conference 25/6/09

Etzioni, A. (1993) *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society.* New York: Touchstone

Faithworks (2007) *Being Who You Say You Are: A Guide to Governance for Faith-based Organisations.* London: NCVO

Faithworks (2008) *Ethos, effectiveness & excellence.* London: Faithworks

Jarvis, D., Porter, F., Lambie, H. & Broughton, K. with Farnell, R. (2010) *Building Better Neighbourhoods: The Contribution of Faith Communities to Oxfordshire life.* Coventry: SURGE

Jochum, V., Pratten, B. and Wilding, K. [eds] (2007) *Faith and Voluntary Action: An overview of current evidence and debates.* London: NCVO

Lewis, J. with Randolph-Horne, E. (2001) *Faiths, Hope and Participation: Celebrating Faith Groups' role in Neighbourhood Renewal.* London: New Economics Foundation (NEF) /Church Urban Fund

McCabe, A. and Phillimore, J. with Mayblin, L. (2010) *Understanding Third Sector 'Below the Radar' Activities: a Review of the Literature.* Birmingham: Third Sector Research Council (TSRC) Briefing Paper No. 29

Miller, S. (2007) *Keeping it Together: a reflective practice tool for faith-based community development practitioners.* London: FbRN UK

Murphy, E., with Ellis, J. (1st edition) and Smith, L. with Matthews, S. (2010) *First Steps in Quality (2nd edition).* London: Charity Evaluation Services

NCVO (2004) *Improving our Performance: a strategy for the voluntary and community sector:* Executive Summary. London: NCVO

Nicholls, J., Lawlor, E., Neitzert, E. & Goodspeed, T. (2009) *A guide to Social Return on Investment.* London: Cabinet Office

Phillimore, J. and McCabe, A. with Soteri-Proctor, A. and Taylor, R. (2010) *Understanding the distinctiveness of small scale, third sector activity: the role of local knowledge and networks in shaping below the radar actions.* Birmingham: TSRC Working Paper 33

Prochaska, E. (2006) *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit.* Oxford. Oxford University Press

Richardson, L. (2008) *DIY Community Action: Neighbourhood problems and community self-help.* Bristol: Policy Press

Sanfilippo, L. & Cooper, M. (1st edition), Murray, R. and Neitzert, E. (2009 update) *Tools for you: approaches to proving and improving for charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprise.* London: CES and NEF

Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action.* Boston: Arena Publishing

Walker, P., Lewis, J., Lingayah, S. & Sommer, F. (2000) *Prove it: Measuring the effect of neighbourhood renewal on local people.* London: Groundwork, NEF and Barclays plc

Westall, A. (2009) *Value and the Third Sector: working paper on ideas for future research.* Birmingham: TSRC Working Paper 25

Winter, J. (2010) *Practical Spirit: Interactive project development for faith-based organisations involved with social action.* London: FbRN UK

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : The participating projects

The projects were drawn from a wide group who applied through the Faith Based Regeneration Network, or related networks. They are located in urban and rural areas where poverty indicators are moderate to high.

Selection criteria were drawn from those set by Community Matters for all projects undertaking VISIBLE and criteria set by FbRN.

To qualify as a project a faith-based organisation had to:
■ recognise their faith as the motivation for community engagement
■ be clear about their values and ethos through the assessment process
■ be established and constituted for over a year
■ be located in its own building
■ be open to develop partnerships with other agencies
■ have a local reach beyond its own faith grouping (eg to contribute in some way to, or champion the local community)
■ have a range of activities open to and led by the community
■ have a desire to contribute more to the local community through activities or campaigns
■ have or be willing to put in place:
  ■ robust financial procedures
  ■ clear governance structure including community representation
  ■ policies to support employment, volunteering, equal opportunities and diversity.

Projects were advised that they would all have a trained mentor to work with them through the assessment criteria.

Projects committed to:
■ attend a one day induction with the mentors run by Community Matters and FbRN
■ work through the VISIBLE standard and requirements using an action plan agreed with the mentor and receive contact (email, phone calls) from the mentor on a weekly basis for the duration of the project
■ arrange and host the final one day onsite assessment carried out by an external assessor appointed by Community Matters.

The projects

Type	Location	Main service provision
Christian	Cornwall - Rural	Community services including children, employment, health, older people, special interest groups, young people
Christian	London	Community services focus on young people, special interest groups
Christian	Bedford	Community services focus on local community history, interfaith learning experiences, music, sport, older people, young people,
Hindu	Preston	Community services, health partnerships, holistic care, older people, young people
Muslim	London	Education. This project had to withdraw
Muslim	London	Community services, children, older people, young people
Multifaith	Pendle District – town based	Community services focus on schools work and building religious understanding and respect
Sikh	Derby	Community services particular focus on young people and inter-cultural learning

Appendix 2 : Participants in the study

Projects

- Building Bridges Pendle: Nelson Lancashire
- Faith in Queen's Park: Bedford
- Gujarat Hindu Society: Preston Lancashire
- North London Muslim Community Centre: London
- Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara: Derby
- The Centre: Newlyn Cornwall
- The Centre: Trinity at Bowes London

Steering Group and Focus group members

Participants were drawn from a range of national organisations across the voluntary community sector, faith sector, government and legal profession.

Steering Group

- Anna Allen: Community Development Foundation
- Richard Bridge: Community Matters
- Warwick Hawkins: Department for Communities and Local Government
- David Rayner: Department for Communities and Local Government
- Harmander Singh: Sikh, FbRN Trustee
- Andy Turner: Church Urban Fund

Focus Groups

- Husna Ahmed: Faith Regen
- Deesha Chadha: Hindu Forum of Britain
- Iain Cloke: Transformation for Regeneration (mentor)
- David Cornick: Churches Together England
- Malcolm Deboo: Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe
- Nadia Denton: Community Matters
- Jane Gallagher: West Midlands Faith Forum
- David Grimwood: Zedakah (mentor)
- Jenny Kartupelis: East of England Faith Forum
- Leonie Lewis: Jewish Volunteer Network
- Jan McHarry: Buddhist
- Steve Miller: Independent Consultant (mentor)
- Ian Owers: Independent Consultant (mentor)
- Hannah Pennock: Community Development Foundation
- Riaz Ravat: St Philip's Centre (mentor)
- Leona Roche: Bates Wells and Braithwaite

Appendix 3 : Research Tools

Project Questions

The projects were visited about two thirds of the way through the research. The interviewers met with the lead staff member, Chair of the Board, volunteers and users. This breadth provided different responses to the questions which gave a good indication across the projects of the impact of the quality standard process.

Opening questions

1   Why do you think that assessing quality and impact is important to your organisation?

2   What do you think is important about it?

Organisational values

3   What are your core values as an organisation and how are they reflected in what you do?

4   Is there anything distinctive or unique about these values that makes you different to non-faith based organisations?

5   How well (or not) are your values recognised & respected by service users and partner organisations?

6   Does VISIBLE enable your values to be articulated and built upon?

Why undertake a quality management system?

7.   Why did your organisation decide to undertake a quality management system?

(on a separate card) Please tick all of the reasons below which you recognise as being valid for your organisation and add any other reasons you can think of:
- ☐ To have a system for assuring the quality of all aspects of the organisation
- ☐ To improve particular aspects of the organisation
- ☐ To improve the quality of our services to our users
- ☐ To improve the outcomes of our services
- ☐ To bring people together to share their ideas for improvement
- ☐ To motivate people
- ☐ To attract more users, Board members or volunteers
- ☐ To show stakeholders, such as funders, how well we are performing
- ☐ To fulfil the membership criteria of umbrella or membership bodies about quality
- ☐ To go on improving over time
- ☐ To gain external accreditation
- ☐ In response to a request from stakeholders that we have a quality mark.

8   What were your first impressions of VISIBLE and why is measuring quality important to you now?

9   Have you previously considered using a quality standards programme and if so, what decision did you make about it and why?

How ready were you to use VISIBLE?

10 8 short questions about how 'ready' your organisation was to undertake VISIBLE

☐ Did you discuss the VISIBLE process with Board members?

☐ With staff?

☐ With service users?

☐ With partners?

☐ With funders?

☐ Did you conduct a 'readiness audit' to assess whether everyone in the organisation was prepared to undertake a quality system?

☐ Were people immediately committed to introducing a quality system, particularly Board members and managers?

☐ Had resources been set aside for the work involved?

And now 2 open questions....

11 Did all the relevant people understand what would be involved with introducing a quality system?

12 How long did it take you to get to the point of being ready to take part in the VISIBLE process?

Your experience of VISIBLE

13 3 closed questions about your experience of VISIBLE

	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate your overall experience of VISIBLE? (1 Poor to 5 Excellent)?					
Has it addressed the areas of work and quality you wanted to prioritise? (from 1 Not addressed to 5 Totally addressed it)					
How easy has VISIBLE been to undertake? (From 1 Very difficult to 5 Very easy)					

14 VISIBLE provides a range of resources to support organisations to meet the standards. If you've used them, please tick the appropriate box to indicate how you rate these services.

(the table on a separate sheet of paper for interviewees to complete)

	Not used	No value	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
online guidance						
self-assessment tools						
telephone advice line						
local agent ('mentor')						
The Workbook						

15 How important have these support services generally been to you in order to undertake the VISIBLE process?

No importance / Moderately important / Important / Quite important / Very important

16 What other forms of support would have been helpful?

17 Is anything missing from VISIBLE that you would like to see?

18 How well does VISIBLE take account of your organisation being faith-based?

20 How has undertaking VISIBLE enabled you to develop your organisation?

19 Do you feel that undertaking VISIBLE has encouraged critical thinking rather than just conformity and has enabled you to learn from your own experiences?

21 Has it encouraged a shared organisational commitment to improving quality?

22 Has VISIBLE brought about the organisational changes and recognition you need?

23 What else is needed for your organisation?

24 What has been the cost to your organisation of conducting VISIBLE and how do these compare to the benefits?

The importance of quality systems for Faith based organisations:

25 Who are you demonstrating your quality to?

Please rank these in order of priority with 1 the most important and 8 the least important

Service users / beneficiaries	
Board of management	
Staff (paid & voluntary)	
Other local agencies	
Local authority	
Funders / grant bodies	
Our national Faith-based body or denomination	
National government	

Any others? (please list)

26 Why is it important for your organisation to use your funds and resources to undertake a quality standard programme?

Please rank these in order of priority with 1 the most important and 7 the least important

To demonstrate the quality of the organisation to service / users

To demonstrate the quality of the organisation to partner agencies

To demonstrate the quality of the organisation to funders / grant bodies

To improve the way the organisation is run

To improve the services / activities the organisation provides

To measure the outcomes and impact of the organisation

To gain accreditation / a quality mark

Any other reasons? (Please list them)

27 Who do you think should pay for this quality system?

Please rank these in order of priority with 1 the most important and 7 the least important

Our organisation

Service users / beneficiaries

Other agencies benefiting from our services

Local authority

Our national faith-based body or denomination

A grant-making body

National government

Any others? (please list them)

28 Do you think national Government should pay for this quality system?

YES/NO

29 Are you aware of good practice policies, procedures and structures in the wider VCS?

YES / NO

30 How much do you rely upon the support from infrastructure bodies, wider networks and support services

Not at all / A little / Moderately / A lot / Totally

31 What would be the implications for your organisation if these infrastructure organisations no longer existed?

Questions about the research project

Thank you very much –apart from one final question in a moment, we've completed the questions about your experiences and impressions of VISIBLE. These last few questions are about the research project itself

32 How aware of the research process have you been?

Not at all aware / A little aware / Moderately aware / Quite aware / Very aware

33 Has being part of this research project developed your organisation?

Not at all / A little / Moderately / A lot / Totally

34 How useful have the research support systems been? ie the programme manager and mentors?

Not at all / A little / Moderately / A lot / Totally

35 We've learnt and benefited a lot from your involvement with the research; what do you think that your organisation has received by being involved with the research?

And one final question to end our interview:

36 Do you feel that you have been able to convey the heart and soul of your organisation through this quality standard?

Focus Group Questions

The focus groups were asked questions drawn from the following set. Their responses gave a wider perspective on the place of faith-based social action in civil society and the importance and relevance of quality assessment in that context.

Opening questions

1. Do you think that assessing quality and impact is important for faith-based organisations? Why / why not?

2. Why should we assess quality & impact? Any reasons why we shouldn't assess quality & impact?

3. Why do faith-based organisations decide to undertake a quality management system?

Please tick all of the reasons below which you recognise as being valid for an organisation and add any other reasons you can think of:
- [ ] To have a system for assuring the quality of all aspects of the organisation
- [ ] To improve particular aspects of the organisation
- [ ] To improve the quality of our services to our users
- [ ] To improve the outcomes of our services
- [ ] To bring people together to share their ideas for improvement
- [ ] To motivate people
- [ ] To attract more users, Board members or volunteers
- [ ] To show stakeholders, such as funders, how well we are performing
- [ ] To fulfil the membership criteria of umbrella or membership bodies about quality
- [ ] To go on improving over time
- [ ] To gain external accreditation.

Open up discussion about these?

Organisational values

4. What is the relationship between worship and social action?

5 Is there anything distinctive or unique about the values of faith-based organisations that are different to non-faith based organisations?

6 Should a quality assurance programme take account of an organisation being faith-based? (and if so, how?)

Readiness to undertake a quality assurance programme

7 Have you undertaken a quality standards programme in your organisation? What QA programmes are you aware of? Which ones, do you think, are appropriate for faith-based organisations to use?

8 How should an organisation prepare to undertake a quality assurance programme?

9 What resources and forms of support are necessary for an organisation to successfully undertake a quality assurance system?

10 What do you know about VISIBLE?

The importance of quality systems for Faith based organisations

ASK THE GROUP TO STICK NUMBERED STICKY DOTS ON THE 3 FLIP CHARTS.

11 Who should faith-based organisations demonstrate their quality to?

Please rank these in order of priority with 1 the most important and 8 the least important

Service users / beneficiaries	
Board of management	
Staff (paid & voluntary)	
Other local agencies	
Local authority	
Funders / grant bodies	
Their national Faith-based body or denomination	
National government	

Any others? (please list)

12 Why is it important for a faith-based organisation to undertake a quality standard programme?

STICKY DOTS UP AGAIN

Please rank these in order of priority with 1 the most important and 8 the least important

To demonstrate the quality of the organisation to service users	
To demonstrate the quality of the organisation to partner agencies	
To demonstrate the quality of the organisation to funders / grant bodies	
To improve the way the organisation is run	
To improve the services / activities the organisation provides	
To measure the outcomes and impact of the organisation	
To gain accreditation / a quality mark	

Any other reasons? (Please list them)

13 Who do you think should pay for a quality system?

STICKY DOTS AGAIN

Please rank these in order of priority with 1 the most important and 8 the least important

The organisation	
Service users / beneficiaries	
Other agencies benefiting from an organisations services	
Local authority	
A national faith-based body or denomination	
A grant-making body	
National government	

Any others? (please list them)

14 How should undertaking a quality assurance programme enable an organisation to develop?

15 How much do you value & recognise an organisation that has completed a quality standard mark?

16 How often are national faith leaders involved with local groups and asked about the services they can provide?

17 Any other final points you want to add about quality & impact & faith-based organisations?

These additional questions were asked of the Mentor focus group

1 Have the values of the organisation you have worked with been articulated and demonstrated in the way they have worked with you?

2 Do you feel that the organisation was ready to undertake VISIBLE?

Why / why not?

3 Did you discuss the VISIBLE process with:
☐ Board members?
☐ With staff?
☐ With service users?
☐ With partners?
☐ With funders?

4 Did you conduct a 'readiness audit' to assess whether everyone in the organisation was prepared to undertake a quality system?

5 Were people immediately committed to introducing a quality system, particularly Board members and managers?

6 Had resources been set aside for the work involved?

7 Did all the relevant people understand what would be involved with introducing a quality system?

8 Does VISIBLE work for these settings and organisations? Is anything missing?

(What is missing in VISIBLE? What are your general impressions of VISIBLE?)

9 VISIBLE provides a range of resources to support organisations to meet the standards. Please indicate how you rate these services.

	Not aware of it	No value	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Online guidance						
Self-assessment tools						
Telephone advice line						
Mentor						
The Workbook						

10 How important have these support services generally been to the organisation in order to undertake the VISIBLE process?

No importance / Moderately important / Important / Quite important / Very important

11 What other forms of support would have been helpful to the organisation?

12 How has undertaking VISIBLE brought about organisational changes and enabled the organisation to develop?

(Reflective learning and critical thinking?

Shared organisational commitment to improving quality?)

13 Has VISIBLE brought about the recognition the organisation desired?

14 Have your expectations about your role as mentor been met and have you been able to fulfil your obligations?

15 Were there any other factors that helped or hindered your role as mentor?

16 How aware of the research process have you been?

Not at all aware / A little aware / Moderately aware / Quite aware / Very aware

17 Has being part of this research project developed your own skills?

Not at all / A little / Moderately / A lot / Totally

18 How useful have the research support systems been?

Not at all / A little / Moderately / A lot / Totally