
PRIVATE TUITION IN ENGLAND

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Introduction

As part of the Government's drive to improve progression and attainment for all pupils, from 2009 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is introducing a national programme of individual tuition for pupils who are falling behind to reach up to 300,000 pupils in each of English and mathematics by 2011. With a few specified exceptions, tuition will be offered by qualified teachers, including private tutors. As there has previously been very little research into the private tuition market, the DCSF commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the Institute of Education (IoE) to investigate the market of private tuition providers for students in Key Stages 1-4 in England. This research brief presents a summary of findings from the research.

Key Findings

Agency characteristics

- Five forms of agency business practice were identified, as follows:
 - **Traditional agencies:** maintained a selected bank of registered tutors and allocated work in response to requests from prospective clients.
 - **Notice board:** agency maintained a website notice board for individual tutor advertisements with contact details allowing clients to negotiate directly with the tutors.
 - **Mediated notice board:** agency maintained a list of registered tutors, from which clients selected but no individual tutor contact details were provided, so contact with the tutor occurred solely through the agency.
 - **Individual / small agencies:** individual tutors or informal professional networks of tutors that allowed work to be shared out or passed along.
 - **Educational centre:** tuition took place at a designated location, often solely dedicated to providing tuition.
- Web searches identified 504 private tuition agencies in England, of which 223 had a working website, and 130 participated in the telephone survey.
- The majority of private tuition agencies surveyed operated regionally (86%), with 14% operating nationally. Regional agencies covered most regions of the country but were concentrated in London (32%) and the South East (25%), and in cities such as Manchester and Birmingham.
- The size of agencies varied hugely but most agencies were small - 41% of those surveyed had 10 or fewer tutors active during the last academic year.



Tutor characteristics

- Around four in 10 agencies (43%) reported that all their tutors were qualified teachers and a further 40% of agencies required tutors to hold a degree. On average, smaller regional agencies reported higher levels of qualifications among tutors than larger or nationwide agencies.
- Security checks were considered important by agencies and tutors themselves. Most agencies (79%) reported that all their tutors had Criminal Records Bureau checks. Most agencies also required all tutors to submit references (75%) and to be interviewed (73%).
- Almost all agencies surveyed offered tuition in maths (97%) and English (93%).

Arrangements for private tuition and delivery of sessions

- One-to-one tuition was more common among agencies than paired or group tuition and was felt, by individual tutors, to offer the best environment for private tuition.
- Tutorials mostly took place at the home of the student (68%) and typically lasted one hour (66%).
- The extent of agency provision for tutoring was highest at Key Stages 2 and 4, suggesting that much private tutoring is in preparation for secondary school entrance and examinations.

Costs

- Surveyed agencies reported that the average (median) cost of a one hour tutorial was £24 but the hourly costs ranged from £1 to £60. Also the information gathered from the website analysis showed that typical tutorial costs were between £22.90 and £24.50 depending on subject and level.
- Average costs were highest in agencies located in London and the South East. Small agencies charged slightly higher median prices than large agencies. Costs were also related to the qualification requirements of tutors within agencies.

- Three key factors influenced the price of tutorials set by individual tutors: local demand and market tuition rates; the Key Stage of the student; and associated travel costs. Tutors offered discounted rates for multiple sessions, group sessions, and for friends and family.
- Tutors felt the following factors underpinned successful outcomes from tuition: sufficient time; the tuition environment; the one-to-one dynamic; the qualities of the tutor; student commitment and engagement; and, parent support.

Background

Little systematic information has been available on the extent of tutoring or the nature of the private tuition market. Previous research shows that the private tuition market is complex and contains a variety of organisational forms (Ireson and Rushforth, 2005). These range from large, high profile agencies and franchises to individual tutors who keep a low profile and see no need to advertise their services as they obtain sufficient business through word of mouth recommendations. This means that there are both visible and hidden components of the market.

The national programme of individual tuition, which is being introduced by the Government from 2009, aims to deliver one to one tuition for students aged seven to 16 who are making slow progress in English and mathematics. Tuition will mainly be delivered by qualified teachers, including private tutors. This research investigates the nature of the private tuition market, and offers information on availability and costs of employing tutors.

Aims

The purpose of this research was to provide a national profile of private tuition providers for students aged 5-16 in England and to offers more detailed information on the characteristics of private tuition transactions, including the costs, location, frequency and length of sessions, how providers find clients and how they assess students' tuition needs.

Methodology

A national database was constructed of private tuition agencies in England that had a 'web presence'. From the 504 entries, information was systematically gathered about the 223 agencies that had their own websites which provided details about the characteristics of the organisation and transactions between tutors and clients. A local database containing the contact details of individual tutors in three local areas (Great Yarmouth, Edgbaston and Marlow) was also constructed. The databases were used for analysis and to provide a sampling frame, and are not available as outputs of the project.

From the 504 agencies in the national database, 300 were sampled and invited to take part in a telephone survey to augment the findings of the database analysis. Structured interviews covering the characteristics of agencies and tutors, arrangements for tutorials and costs were completed with 130 agencies. Sixty-six agencies were screened out on the grounds that they comprised of individual tutors operating under a company name or were no longer trading. The response rate was therefore 43% overall and 56% of agencies known to be eligible.

In addition, 17 in-depth interviews were conducted with individual tutors in Edgbaston and Marlow. These interviews sought to explore the nature of private tuition transactions, including their content and how they were arranged. The sample for the interviews with individual tutors was designed to achieve diversity in tutor experience.

Findings

Agency characteristics and sourcing business
Five forms of agency business practice were identified, as follows.

- **Traditional agencies:** maintained a selected bank of registered tutors and allocated work in response to requests from prospective clients.
- **Notice board:** agency maintained a website notice board for individual tutor advertisements with contact details allowing clients to negotiate directly with the tutors.

- **Mediated notice board:** agency maintained a list of registered tutors, from which clients selected but no individual tutor contact details were provided, so contact with the tutor occurred solely through the agency.
- **Individual / small agencies:** individual tutors or informal professional networks of tutors that allowed work to be shared out or passed along.
- **Educational centre:** tuition took place at a designated location, often solely dedicated to providing tuition.

Web searches identified 504 private tuition agencies in England, of which 223 had a working website, and 130 participated in the telephone survey.

The size of agencies varied hugely in terms of the number of tutors, number of students, amount of tuition offered and the number of offices or branches in England¹. Larger agencies claimed to have nationwide coverage (14% of those surveyed), while smaller agencies covered only a region or local area (86%). Most agencies were small - 41% had 10 or fewer tutors active during the last academic year.

The availability of private tuition was unevenly distributed across England, being more common in London and the South East and in cities such as Manchester and Birmingham, but less available in the North. Regional agencies in the survey covered most regions of the country but were concentrated in London (32%) and the South East (25%).

Overall, word of mouth was the most popular means by which agencies recruited students (58%). This was followed by recruitment through the agency website (42%), Yellow Pages (41%) and adverts in local newspapers (40%). Larger agencies used a wider range of methods and smaller agencies focused more on word of mouth. Individual tutors sourced business via multiple means: online notice-boards; directory listings; leafleting; advertising in local press and shop windows; word of mouth; and private tuition agencies.

¹ For the purpose of analysis the agencies were classified into three categories according to the number of active tutors registered with an agency (small with up to 10 tutors, medium with between 11 and 50 tutors, and large with more than 50 tutors). Further details are provided in the full report.

Agencies recruited tutors primarily by word of mouth (50%), an agency website (33%) and adverts in local newspapers (32%).

Agencies were busier in spring and autumn months and quieter in winter and summer. Some agencies worked in collaboration with other agencies, with 37% passing work to tutors not registered with the agency when they could not take on the work.

Tutor characteristics

In the survey, fewer than half the agencies (43%) reported that all their tutors were qualified teachers and a further 40% of agencies required tutors to hold a degree. On average, smaller regional agencies reported higher levels of qualifications among tutors than larger or nationwide agencies.

The extent of experience held by tutors in agencies mirrored to some extent their qualifications. Most of the agencies with the more highly qualified tutors also required tutors to have some teaching experience. Conversely, most of the agencies with the less well qualified tutors also did not require tutors to have prior experience of teaching or tutoring.

Most tutors working in agencies worked part-time (79%) and were self-employed (84%).

Security checks were considered important by agencies and tutors themselves. Most agencies (79%) reported that all their tutors had Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. Most agencies also required all tutors to submit references (75%) and to be interviewed (73%). Of the remaining agencies, many were among those that did not routinely recruit new tutors. Information about security checks was often omitted from websites, leaving the onus on clients to obtain this information from the agency or from individual tutors.

Individual tutors prioritised providing personal safety assurances to parents and students. References were reportedly considered less critical than personal recommendation and continued reflection on individual student-tutor relationships.

The main forms of quality assurance were formal feedback from parents (reported by 79% of agencies) and students (64%). Agencies reported a wide range of quality assurance measures. Tutors did not routinely refer to their own performance and development but offered parents the opportunity to view tuition sessions as quality assurance.

Arrangements for private tuition and delivery of sessions

Many agencies covered most or all subjects in the school curriculum, while a significant number specialized in English or mathematics or both. Almost all the agencies surveyed offered tuition in maths (97%) and English (93%).

The extent of agency provision for tutoring was highest at Key Stages 2 and 4, suggesting that much private tutoring is in preparation for secondary school entrance and examinations. In the survey, 72% of agencies offered preparation for school entrance.

One-to-one tuition was the main mode of tuition delivery among most (78%) agencies. In addition, group tuition was offered by over half the agencies (55%) and paired tuition was offered by 40% of agencies. One-to-one tuition was felt to offer the best environment for private tuition among individual tutors.

Tutors considered the following before arranging to provide private tuition services: the individual circumstances and needs of the student; requirements for the subject and Key Stage; and the location, timing, and cost of sessions.

Agency managers reported that tutorials usually took place at the home of the student (68%). Other locations cited by agency managers included the tutor's home (52%), at a centre (40%) or school (25%). From the viewpoint of tutors, the advantages of conducting tutorials in the home of the student were that they felt more able to offer assurances of safety and it was easier to give regular feedback to the parents following tuition sessions. When tutorials took place in the home of the tutor, the dedicated environment for tuition sessions was thought to impact positively on students' motivation and commitment.

Tutorials typically lasted one hour (66%).

Almost all agencies (96%) offered individualised tuition tailored to the needs of the student. A minority of agencies (22%) offered a pre-defined programme of tuition. Individual tutors emphasised a flexible approach to tuition sessions based on the specific needs of the student.

Individual tutors attributed successful outcomes from tutorials to the following factors: sufficient time; the tuition environment; the one-to-one dynamic; the qualities of the tutor; student commitment and engagement; and parent support.

Costs

The average (median) cost of a one hour tutorial was £24 but the hourly costs ranged from £1 to £60. This cost was based on the assumption that travel costs were included and the tutor was a qualified teacher. In case of the website analysis typical costs were between £22.90 and £24.50 depending on subject and level.

Most agencies (62%) set a fixed price for tutorials. For the remainder, the cost depended on a number of factors, including the level of learning, location or travel costs and length of session. The number of students in the group also affected the cost.

Individual tutors set the cost of tuition according to local demand and market tuition rates, the Key Stage of the student, and travel costs. Tutors offered discounted rates for multiple sessions, group sessions, and for friends and family.

Median costs were similar for English and maths and rose slightly with level of learning. Median costs were highest in agencies located in London and the South East and lower in agencies that were nationwide or located in regions outside the South East. Small agencies charged slightly higher median prices than large agencies. Costs were also related to the qualification requirements of tutors within agencies.

Some agencies provided a price range within which tutors negotiated fees with their clients and in some cases discounts were offered for two-to-one or group tutoring.

Reference

Ireson, J. and Rushforth, K. (2005) *Mapping and evaluating shadow education*, ESRC Research Project RES-000-23-0117. Institute of Education, University of London.

Additional Information

The full report (DCSF-RR081) can be accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Jenny Buckland, 4FL-SARD, DCSF, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.