



Impetus

NTP tuition partners: Transformational not transactional

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Definitions

In this report, we refer to:

- Tuition providers – who provide programmes of tuition. These can be for profit or not for profit. They are distinct from agencies providing tutors in that they control the tutoring to a greater degree – *tuition* providers not *tutor* providers. They can apply to the tuition partners contractor to become accredited tuition partners.
- Tuition partners – those tuition providers who have been accredited by the tuition partners contractor to deliver the National Tutoring Programme, having passed through rigorous quality criteria. Some tuition providers will apply to become tuition partners but be unsuccessful as they fall short of the criteria.
- The tuition partners contractor – the organisation responsible for delivering the tuition partners programme of work under contract with Department for Education. For 2022-23 this is Tribal, but this report is about whoever delivers the tuition partners work, rather than being about Tribal per se.
- The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) – the programme offered to schools, which will be delivered by DfE and its three contractors (including the tuition partners contractor). There is no longer a central NTP organisation
- The Department for Education (DfE) – who in the new contracting arrangements are effectively responsible for overall coherence and delivery of the NTP. Note that DfE has both delivery responsibilities (either itself or through partners) and policy responsibilities

Executive summary

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) aims to improve the availability of quality tuition so that all schools have access to it. This is vital to ensuring every young person gets the support they need to succeed. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are only half as likely to pass crucial GCSE exams in English and maths, are particularly in need of this help.

Tuition partners (TPs) – external tuition providers for schools – are a key pillar of the NTP because the evidence shows a high-quality tuition provider can be transformational for young people.

Impetus has been funding the charity Action Tutoring since 2014. In 2021, 80% of the pupils Action Tutoring supported achieved GCSE grade 4+ in English or maths, more than 10 percentage points higher than young people more widely – despite deliberately targeting pupils at risk of missing out.¹

In 2018, an Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) trial found that pupils who received tutoring from Tutor Trust made three months' additional progress.² Both charities specialise in supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with around three quarters of the pupils they tutor eligible for the pupil premium.

But the quality of tuition providers varies, and the best provision is not always available to the schools and pupils who need them most. Previous attempts to pilot tuition found 40% of schools struggling to recruit the tutors needed, and a reluctance to use agency tutors due to quality concerns.³ Clearly, schools need support to make tutoring work.

In the first years of NTP, the tuition partners pillar was designed to address challenges like this. A quality bar sets minimum standards, and deliberate targeting of cold spots helps spread best practice. There is a risk that in the understandable desire to simplify NTP for schools who have faced a complicated year of Randstad running the NTP, much of this work will be lost in future years and NTP may not fulfil its potential.⁴

There are three key areas where the Department for Education must work with the new provider to ensure the tuition partners element of NTP lives up to its potential.

Firstly, to support schools' access to quality tuition, **the DfE and the tuition partners contractor should ensure availability of programme data**, through the regular release of management information by the contractor. This underpins everything else. The sector needs to know if tuition partners are actually reaching the pupils that need it most, but this data needs to be used responsibly. This isn't about punitive league tables, but about developing a picture of where schools are not getting what they need from NTP. Chapter 2 provides an outline of what data is needed, and how it should be used.

Secondly, to improve the quality of the tuition market, **the DfE should expect its tuition partners contractor to offer a capacity building programme.** A well-designed set of impact focussed masterclasses and seminars on topics related to delivering quality tuition would enable existing tuition partners to improve and ensure high standards, while also supporting providers who fall short of accreditation criteria to make a stronger application next year. Over time, this will improve the quality of tutoring, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for young people. Chapter 3 provides a sketch outline of what a programme to improve quality could look like, based on Impetus' years of delivering such work and our work with EEF in year one of NTP.

Finally, to drive the uptake of quality tuition, **the Department should explore allowing higher subsidy rates for higher quality tuition partners** to incentivise schools to choose higher quality tuition partners. This would also effectively give schools more choice on how the money is spent – they can spend it on higher quality tuition for fewer pupils, if they wish. The earliest this could be introduced is 2023-24. Chapter 4 outlines how these structural elements would work in practice to drive uptake of quality tuition through the tuition partners pillar.

The success of the Tuition Partners model depends on more than just these actions – it depends on the success of the overall NTP offer. Impetus will release a further report later this summer with recommendations on how the Department and it's three contractors should work together to ensure the NTP operates as a coherent whole.

We know from our many years working with Action Tutoring and the Tutor Trust that high quality tutoring can change young people's lives. We were delighted to support the DfE and EEF in the delivery of year one of NTP. We believe in the potential of the NTP, and are committed to championing the role of tutoring to support the young people who need it most.

1 Introduction

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – those eligible for pupil premium funding – are only about half as likely to get crucial GCSE passes in English and maths. This attainment gap had been closing very slowly, and just prior to the pandemic progress had stalled for the first time in a decade.⁵ Then the pandemic hit, with all the evidence suggesting this will widen the attainment gap.⁶

Impetus exists to transform the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, by ensuring they get the support they need to succeed. It's why we helped set up the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in 2011, to grow the evidence base on what high quality support looks like. It's why we've been funding Action Tutoring since 2014, a high impact tutoring charity. And it's why we worked with EEF to make the case for, and then roll out, the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) in 2020.

Tutoring is one of the best-evidenced interventions for supporting young people to make accelerated progress, with the EEF toolkit showing small group tuition can lead to up to 4 months of additional progress.⁷ Their evaluation of The Tutor Trust in the north of England found similar results.ⁱ

But quality tutoring isn't readily available to every school that needs it. Previous attempts to roll out tutoring more widely as part of the *Making Good Progress* pilot in the late 2000s suffered from the difficulty in finding quality tutors and concerns about the quality of external tutors.⁸ Ultimately, these are the problems NTP is trying to solve for schools – improving the availability of quality tuition.

The government has always set an ambitious agenda for the scale of the NTP. From the original plan to spend £350m on tutoring in the immediate response to the pandemic, through to the current multi-year ambition to deliver up to six million courses of tutoring (equivalent to over half of all school pupils), political will has never been an issue.

If anything, the government has been too ambitious – the challenges of getting tutoring to everyone who needs it cannot be solved overnight. Indeed, the fact NTP still struggles with these challenges is in part a reflection on the speed of roll out. Ministers are right to be ambitious – young people often only get one chance at an education – but a consequence of stretching targets is that things feel stretched. It seems unlikely that the target of 6 million courses will be met, and the new government should not wed itself to this target at the expense of ensuring the tutoring that is delivered is high quality.

The chances of delivering the NTP successfully were not helped by the sudden addition of the schools-led tutoring route as a response to the political pressure created by the resignation of Education Recovery Commissioner Sir Kevan Collins in 2021. The original policy intention had been an NTP built on two complementary pillars of Academic Mentors and Tuition Partners (TP). Indeed, this was what DfE tendered for, prior to this resignation.

Schools-led tuition did not fit well with the other elements, and this structural feature has reduced the effectiveness of NTP as much as any implementation failures by the contractor Randstad. Many tuition partners have ended up doing business via the schools-led route due to the complicated portal that Randstad introduced for the tuition partners delivery – this is an implementation failure. But the inevitable consequence of giving schools the freedoms of schools-led tutoring is to make some tuition partner programmes look unduly rigid by comparison. As this rigidity is usually the basis of the quality and impact the tuition partners have, there is a structural tension here.

Today, NTP is at a crossroads, with new contractors taking over for the new academic year with all the money flowing via the schools-led route. It is possible to imagine the new, simplified NTP where schools control the money leading to a system where they are basically on their own to try and find the best tutoring they can. The intention to promote greater autonomy may result in a lack of support to make the NTP work as effectively as it could. But it is also possible to imagine an NTP that adds value and helps schools secure the tutoring they want – and their pupils need. No-one can change the past, but the future is yet to be written.

This report aims to set out the steps the tuition partners contractor (Tribal) and the Department for Education need to take to make the tuition partners element of the NTP a success in the coming years.

At Impetus, we believe tutoring has the potential to transform the lives of young people from disadvantage backgrounds. That's why we've backed it and will continue to offer up critique and constructive solutions to ensure that, ultimately, all young people get the support they need to succeed.

2 Data and performance management

The vision is a successful NTP, with high quality tuition available to all schools as needed. To get there, and to know we've got there, we need more data to be available.

Data has to be used sensitively as a starting point to understand what is going on, not the end point. There is often a fear in the sector that data will be used to produce simple analysis like league tables, which in turn are used without further context to pass judgement. This approach is unhelpful and should be avoided.

But it's impossible to drive improvements in NTP without knowing what's going on. We know from the government's data releases which regions and local authorities are most likely to be using tuition partners – and this is a starting point to start asking if the challenge is availability, for example. But this will doubtless vary between primary and secondary schools (not to mention for special schools and alternative provision). It may well vary between English, maths, and other subjects. Data is the starting point to understand this.

For tuition partners, there are three kinds of data that need to be made available. And in each case, breakdowns are required by local authority, year group and subject to provide the rich picture needed to understand the programme.

Firstly, we need tuition provider market data - number of applicants to become accredited tuition partners broken down by score against the quality thresholds. This would provide an annual snapshot of the state of the tuition provider market, whether it is improving over time, and also demonstrate that the quality bar is not being lowered. It will also allow greater clarity about the areas where the market is weakest whether they be geographic areas or subject areas. NTP should be looking to address these, and one measure of success should be the availability of quality tuition partners improving over time.

Secondly, we need to understand the choices schools are making about how to engage with NTP, but also the choices they want to make but can't. NTP should have a system to capture the types of tutoring schools are looking for, both real requests for tuition partners from schools looking for tutoring and also wider survey data for schools not currently looking for support. By comparing this to the types of tutoring being used, NTP can identify the cold spots it needs to address.

Finally, we need to understand which pupils are benefitting from tuition partners. At the headline level, reaching pupils eligible for the pupil premium has always been a priority for NTP. As it stands, we don't know whether it is succeeding. If it's not, there is actually a risk it is making the attainment gap worse, which is not something anyone involved in NTP actually wants. Similarly, we have no understanding of whether it is reaching pupils with special educational needs or in alternative provision settings or non-exam cohorts.

One area where data is less helpful is at the level of the tuition partner. Tuition partners operate in different contexts and will have different specialties, making direct comparison between them is harder. Of course, the tuition partners contractor (Tribal) will need to track their performance. But providers operating in eg the South West will have lower levels of pupil premium pupils than Central London. Without this context, and in the absence of any provider level targets, provider level data is only really helpful for identifying gaps between supply and demand, which can be better identified by looking at unmet demand directly.

The data outlined in this chapter needs to be released in nearer to real time, and is not a replacement for proper independent evaluation. But evaluation takes time, and should include measures of pupil level outcomes – this won't be quick enough to inform programme development. Evaluation should also look at which elements of the capacity building programme (chapter 4) are having the greatest effect on the tuition market.

This data enables a greater understanding of the NTP programme. But this is not just of academic interest – the data should be used by the sector and the tuition partners contractor to improve the availability of quality tuition.

3 Improving the availability of quality tuition

There isn't enough high-quality tuition available for schools to use. This is both the problem that the NTP was originally set up to address, and a challenge behind its roll out. Growing the number and reach of tuition partners must remain a central objective.

The picture varies – the tuition partners market is not monolithic. In the South West, around one in eight schools make use of a tuition partner, compared to nearly one in four in London.⁹ As always, regional figures hide big differences between local authorities. Schools in Halton are two and a half times as likely to be using a tuition partner as in Wirral elsewhere in Liverpool. Tuition partner availability and usage also varies by subject and by school type, though as noted there has been less data transparency about this.

One of the original assumptions was that the opportunity to deliver NTP services as an accredited tuition partner would incentivise providers to improve practice to meet the quality bar. In 2021-22, schools were able to use tutoring providers, regardless of quality, through the schools-led route, which undermines the aims of NTP. It is welcome that this loophole has been closed for 2022-23 onwards.¹⁰

It was also hoped that the high-quality tuition partners would expand to meet the needs of more schools. But scaling a proven intervention while maintaining quality is hard. Different organisations face different challenges, but in our experience a 30% annual growth rate for an established organisation is a challenge but a reasonable one.ⁱⁱ It is worth pausing for a second to think through what it would take for an organisation to grow to meet it. Box 1 runs through some initial problems that would need to be resolved in order to double the reach of a tutoring organisation.

For organisations to improve their practice or scale well requires both commitment on their part and support in the form of capacity building. Ultimately, NTP can't be successful unless organisations get this support as the underlying availability of quality tuition partners will remain unchanged. But capacity building is not a panacea. Tuition partners won't deliver quality at scale unless their leaders want them to and the NTP incentivises it to make it necessary.

This is the single biggest risk the NTP faces – in its desire to meet the pressing needs of schools in the here and now, it neglects the long-term work needed to change the system. This was supposed to be the point of NTP – a time-limited intervention to develop a better market for quality tuition, so that all schools could access it when they needed to.

What should this capacity building support look like?

Firstly, the application to become an accredited tuition partner can be used as a diagnostic, identifying areas for development. This is as true for successful tuition partners, who will still have areas to strengthen if they are to grow successfully, as it is for those who do not meet the quality standards.

Secondly, tuition partners and potential tuition partners need a series of masterclasses, themed around the areas that underpin the quality standards. In the first year of NTP, Impetus and Nesta delivered some capacity support to tuition partnersⁱⁱⁱ, with masterclasses themed around:

- Tutor recruitment and deployment
- School recruitment and management
- Pupil attendance and dosage
- Programme adaptation when scaling
- Pupil baselining
- Tracking delivery
- Governing for impact

Thirdly, tuition partners and potential tuition partners need some one-to-one coaching to help them translate what they've learned in the masterclasses into their own contexts. This essential step improves the chances of the content being implemented and quality of practice improving. In the first year of NTP, tuition partners received around 6 hours of coaching.

For accredited tuition partners, this work covers the tuition partners contractor's (Tribal) quality assurance work. It's a proactive rather than reactive approach that drives quality forward, rather than simply enforcing a minimum standard. This reflects the broader ethos of the NTP, as a programme designed to drive improvement.

This approach to a capacity building offer is based on our experience of delivering similar work to charities we fund, but there is also an important difference. Our work with charities is deeper and more long term, and this is the basis for high quality delivery over the long term. But, the NTP has slightly different goals and a different time horizon. This is a starting point for capacity building for a short term programme, working with a larger group of organisations, including for-profits.

It won't be possible to improve the quality of tuition providers without understanding the needs of the users – schools. Capacity building work must be underpinned by regular school roundtables to understand the experience and needs on the ground. Alongside this, NTP should enable schools to learn from each other, by convening webinars for exemplar schools to share best-practice with others on dealing with common pain points.

And alongside this, the NTP should use the data and performance information it has to hand to set and deliver it's own agenda to improve the availability of tutoring. By understanding where schools needs are not being met, whether that's a geographic area, a subject or a year group, NTP can target its capacity building where it is needed most – cold spots.

ⁱⁱⁱ We did this to support EEF with the roll out of NTP, and based on our experience supporting the charities we fund. We do not normally offer capacity building services outside the charities we choose to fund

Implementing changes to improve quality may have costs associated with it for tuition partners. In principle, NTP may need to consider in future whether to offer some funding to cover such costs. But in the short term it is right to assume the opportunity to expand delivery and access more NTP delivery funding will act as incentive enough. Again, a clear understanding of these cold spots – a sign of an underserved market – will provide a sound basis for tuition partners to invest to meet the need.

This capacity building programme need not be expensive – significantly under a million pounds per year, a fraction of a percentage of the overall spend on the billion-pound tutoring revolution. But it's this element of a coherent NTP that is essential to securing the legacy for NTP: high quality tutoring more widely available for schools.

Box 1: The challenges of scaling a tuition partner

Let's suppose you want to double the reach of your high-quality tuition partner.

Do your existing tutors want to tutor more hours, or do you need twice as many tutors? This partly depends on who your tutors are – volunteers are probably less likely to be willing to tutor more. Either way you probably end up with a lot more tutors. How much harder are they to recruit (assuming you want to keep your quality high) – can you do your existing recruitment plan, but “more of it”, or do you need to find new sources of tutors? You almost certainly more people to assess applications. More tutors means more training. Do you have enough tutor trainers to train them all?

Much of this is sequential: You need the extra recruitment and assessment resource in place before you recruit the tutors before you can train them before you can deploy them – i.e. before you get paid for any of this. Do you have the money in the bank for this? How much of a risk do you want to take investing for growth if this doesn't come off - especially as NTP is known to undergo sudden significant changes structurally like “a new route for schools” or “a new prime contractor”...

You probably need some kind of a restructure – if your delivery team has 15 local delivery staff reporting into 3 area leads reporting into your programme director, presumably you now need 30 local delivery leads. Do you want 6 area leads all reporting into one director and what does that mean for workloads?

You'll also need additional HR resource, additional finance resource, additional IT resource, additional office space (OR improved structures and processes for hybrid working) for all these extra people.

And of course, you also need to do all of this year's delivery well, which is a full-time job.

4 Driving the uptake of quality tuition

The status quo in the tuition provider market is:

- A small number of high-quality tuition partners delivering around 200,000 courses per year (commercial and not for profit)
- A larger number of lower-quality potential tuition partners, who could deliver tutoring via the schools-led route in 2021-22 but won't be able to going forward (commercial and not for profit)
- An even larger number of providers and individuals who do not engage with NTP but sell tutoring services directly to parents (for profit)

As NTP builds a growing number of tuition partners in the first group, how do we encourage schools to make use of quality tuition?

This needs to be a more sensible approach than simply pressuring schools to use NTP because Ministers have set a target. For tutoring to work well, schools need to be invested in making it work well, because it is the right thing to do, rather than simply doing it to tick a box for Ofsted or DfE or parents.

It is welcome that schools will no longer be allowed to use tuition providers who have not been accredited as tuition partners. It is worth reflecting on the extent to which this has risked undermining the overall NTP overall.

In NTP as originally conceived, this was not a problem. Schools had two choices: an academic mentor, a full-time, trained member of staff that they could deploy mostly as they wished; or, a tuition partner, a high-quality external provider of tutoring that meets a set quality standard. It was intended that academic mentors would be targeted at the schools with the greatest need so that schools could avoid all the overhead costs and logistical challenges of having a large number of different tutors all doing only a few hours tutoring per week.

Giving schools more control of how they engage with tutoring is a sensible idea. In principle, there are advantages to allowing schools to spend NTP money either on employing existing staff for additional hours, or hiring other people they already know such as recently retired former teachers, as tutors. This was a common request in the first year of the programme, although something of more use to schools with the time and networks to make this work – for lots of schools, this is not an option.

But in practice, schools-led tutoring has inadvertently upset the overall balance of NTP and created a back door for external providers to avoid the quality checks. This was an oversight. It is essential that tuition partners meet strict quality criteria on issues that the evidence shows underpin high quality tuition like tutor training and group sizes. At the moment, schools have no incentive to pick providers that meet these standards – if anything, having to engage with bureaucratic systems acts as a disincentive to choosing quality. This is to the detriment of pupils.

It is possible for schools to have the best of both worlds with the loophole closed: if schools want to use tuition providers, they should be able to use proven, quality tuition partners; it should be easy and straightforward to do so; and this should not prevent them hiring individual tutors if that's their preferred option. Getting this right is not only in the best interests of pupils, but also in the best interests of schools, by cutting down on the workload involved in trying to assess different tutoring providers – these assessments can be done centrally.

Telling schools what they cannot do is not always popular, even if it is the right thing to do. With term ending and record-breaking temperatures, it's unclear how many schools have fully understood the revised guidance, and it remains an open question how this will be monitored and enforced. It's important schools understand why the change has been made, and the benefits to them and their pupils.

As well as being done for good reason, and with advantages for schools, it should be accompanied by positive measures to encourage schools to opt for high quality tutoring. This is part of “constellation of support” proposed by the Centre for Education and Youth in their own report on the NTP, which enables schools to have the “scaffolded autonomy”.¹¹

The most straightforward way to offer additional incentives for quality is for schools to receive higher subsidies for higher quality tutoring. At the moment, the subsidy is the same for best-in-class tutoring as well as for those tuition partners who only just meet the quality criteria. Indeed, schools do not even know which providers are which.

Tuition partners could be divided into tiers with higher subsidies available for the higher quality providers. Instead of a 60% subsidy for all tuition partners, schools could instead receive (for example) a 70% subsidy for using the best tuition partners, a 40% subsidy for using excellent but not quite as good tuition partners, and a 10% subsidy for using high quality providers that only just meet the minimum standards. These tiers could be badged as Gold, Silver, and Bronze. Ultimately there is more than one good answer to the questions of the number of tiers, the thresholds for each, and the level of subsidy (and how all these things change over time). What matters is the structure: higher subsidy for higher quality, while maintaining a high minimum bar.

This in turn would widen school choice – for a given sum of money, schools could choose either higher quality tuition for fewer pupils, or put more pupils into slightly lower standard of tutoring. As long as a minimum quality bar is met, these are exactly the kinds of choices schools should have. A commitment to high standards does not need to be at the expense of flexibility for schools – what's essential is offering flexibility where it makes sense.

It is too late to introduce this for 2022-23, but the government should investigate options, with a view to consulting with the education sector for introduction in 2023-24.

Measures to ensure tutoring through tuition partners is of high quality are essential, and not incompatible with greater freedom for schools. But these approaches will be of limited impact where quality tutoring is less widely available. These measures can only succeed if

5 Conclusions and recommendations

NTP has a chance to be an amazing success, changing the tutoring landscape for schools and young people and narrowing the persistent attainment gap. As it stands, there is a risk that this potential will not be met.

To achieve its full potential, NTP requires some tweaks. These are relatively low cost, both financially and politically, but are potentially the difference between an NTP that is transformational rather than transactional.

- The Department for Education and the tuition partners contractor (Tribal) should ensure availability of management information from the programme to enable the tuition partner offer to develop and meet more schools' needs.
- The Department for Education should negotiate into its contract with the contractor additional requirements around a capacity building programme to grow the availability of quality tutoring
- The Department for Education should explore higher subsidy rates for higher quality providers

This is not a menu of ideas, this is a package of reforms that is not as impactful if only delivered in part. These recommendations are interlocked and reinforce one another. There is no point in making better data available if it isn't used to improve the availability of quality tuition. We can't know improve the availability of quality tuition without data on the availability of the quality tuition. Clear gaps in provision will incentivise providers to expand the availability of quality tutoring. Higher subsidies for higher quality act as an incentive to improve quality and for schools to choose higher quality, and schools choosing higher quality also incentivises improvements. These are virtuous cycles.

NTP faces a fork in the road. Young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds need NTP to choose the path that leads towards quality tutoring, available to all schools that need it.

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About Impetus

Impetus transforms the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring they get the right support to succeed in school, in work and in life.

We do this by finding, funding and building the most promising charities working with these young people and by influencing policy and resources.

We support a number of charities helping to give disadvantaged young people a chance to succeed in school, in work and in life.

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