PAST LESSONS, FUTURE VISION – EVOLVING STATE-FUNDED TUTORING FOR THE FUTURE

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All errors of fact, opinion and judgement are the authors' own.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and the 16-19 Tuition Fund (16-19TF) were government-funded tutoring schemes for all state schools and colleges in England that ran for four years from the academic year 2020-2021 through to 2023-24.

The programmes were created in response to the pandemic and the unequal impact of 'lost learning', which disproportionately impacted disadvantaged pupils. Both NTP and 16-19TF were founded with a specific focus on these pupils, recognising both that the Covid-19 pandemic was exacerbating the longstanding attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and the solid evidence base underpinning one-to-one and small-group tutoring as a way of addressing this.

Both programmes went through several iterations during their four years of funding before formally ending at the end of the summer term 2024. The Department for Education (DfE) estimates that in total, 6,168,958 tutoring courses were started between November 2020 and August 2024 for NTP, meeting – and exceeding - the 6 million course target promised by the former Prime Minister.[1] No statistics have been released for 16-19TF take up.

Successive evaluations of NTP have showed impact on an annual basis, recognising that details of the scheme changed from year to year.[2] For the final year of evaluation to date (Year 3 – academic year 2022/23), the NFER found that for KS2 participation in NTP was associated with small improvements in English and maths outcomes, with larger and more consistent improvements seen in maths, although these improvements equated to one month's additional progress or less. There was more limited evidence for KS4, where evaluations suggested that NTP may be associated with very small improvements in English and maths outcomes. However, the report acknowledged that due to limitations with the analysis, the true impact of the NTP is likely to be greater than these results suggest. The evidence did suggest that NTP had a very small additional benefit for Pupil Premium pupils and pupils with low prior attainment. Importantly, the evaluation found that the optimum number of tutoring hours for greatest impact is likely to lie above 20 hours per pupil (a higher number than was delivered through NTP).[3]

There has been just one (relatively) brief evaluation of 16-19TF, which did not measure the impact of the programme on attainment, but set out the ways in which the 16-19TF had been used, and suggested that on the basis of self-reported data from schools, colleges and pupils, most had found the tutoring helpful (89%) and relevant (88%), with a positive impact on attainment as well as wider spillover benefits including motivation, confidence and study skills.[4]

The aim of this report was to do two things:

- **In Part 1, to act as an analysis of policy formulation, and draw lessons from how NTP and 16-19TF were designed;**
- **In Part 2, to outline a set of recommendations for any future state funded tutoring schemes that a future administration may consider.**

We draw a number of conclusions from this work.

In Part 1, we make findings around three themes: the way in which tutoring was conceived as a major state programme during the pandemic; the way it was rolled out; and its legacy.

We conclude that a **national tutoring offer for schools and colleges in 2020 was the result of an unusual set of circumstances**; it illustrates the strength of a combination of political leadership and an evidence base. And tutoring also **meant different things to different policymakers, which aided its speed of implementation but harmed rollout.** We also conclude that the initial burst of support for tutoring quickly dissipated, not helped by the **churn across government during the course of NTP and 16-19TF which meant there was no consistent champion for tutoring** in No.10, Treasury or DfE, and the Opposition made political capital from it. Overall, it should not be forgotten that **the volume of tutoring delivered in schools and colleges was successful to an extent that most (if not all) people would have seen as impossible at the outset**. But while awareness of tutoring and sentiment towards it are positive across the board, without an underpinning theory of change, **it did not become the integrated element of the education system that (at least) some envisaged it would**.

In Part 2 we learn the lessons of NTP and 16-19TF, and draw conclusions for a future potentially redrawn scheme. We draw from discussions with experts, as well as with parents and teachers, and we present a taxonomy for policymakers and key design principles that should be considered for a future scheme.

We think that there are a number of what we call essential principles for a new scheme, as well as a few areas on which at present time we would be more cautious about. **Tutoring should exist in all key stages, including post-16**. It should exist **as a mixed model**: both school and college-delivered and externally-provided tutoring should be used according to local needs and demand. There should be a form of quality assurance for external provision, **and light-touch accountability, and no match funding**. The default format should be **1:1 or small-group, in-person tutoring**, and it should be **focussed on English and maths**, for course duration (and funding) **of at least 12 hours**. We think there are legitimate trade offs around **when and where tutoring happens**, and **the role of school staff**. Finally, we are **optimistic about the potential of AI, but note that (in Spring 2025) there is significant caution from teachers and parents on this**. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we conclude that government needs to decide whether tutoring is a standards raising intervention, or an intervention targeting the attainment gap. From this decision flows a lot of work on which students are targeted, and where funding comes from. On this, we find disagreement between parents, and teachers and external providers. Both are valid for government to choose – but the lesson from NTP is failing to choose leads to confusion.

Ultimately, it will be for any future government to design a future scheme, but we hope that the principles set out here learn the lessons of past work, and help shape the best possible outcome for the future.

PART 1:
THE IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION OF NTP AND 16-19TF, 2020-2024

CONTEXT

This first part looks back at the operation of tutoring in schools between 2020 and 2024.

The purpose of this is not to provide a factual history of how NTP and 16-19TF were structured, which are available in multiple other places;[5] nor is it to summarise or debate the effectiveness of tutoring, which is also available in the official evaluations and in third-party analyses.[6] Instead, it is designed to act as an analysis of policy formulation.

In particular, this first report acts as a 'first draft of history' of the way in which NTP and 16-19TF operated during the four years of government funding, with a particular focus on policy design and implementation. Although we have spoken to, and consider the impact on, school and college leaders, the bulk of this report concentrates on NTP and 16-19TF through a policy lens.

The aim is to draw almost contemporaneous conclusions as to the way in which the policies operated, in order to capture important lessons for future politicians, policymakers and others who may be interested in delivering some form of tuition programme in the future. We do so by seeking first-hand testimony from a number of those very closely involved with the policy, such that lessons can be learned from the way in which the two tutoring schemes did and did not operate effectively.

While we start from the perspective of having supported the concept of state-funded tutoring schemes, we present unfiltered conclusions, which identify significant weaknesses, as well as strengths, of the last four years.

[1] Department for Education (2024). National Tutoring Programme. Accessed : https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/national-tutoring-programme/2023-24

[2] Lucas, M., Moore, E., Morton C., Staunton, R., Welbourne S. (2023). Independent Evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme Year 2: Impact Evaluation. NFER. Accessed: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/independent-evaluation-of-the-national-tutoring-programme-year-2-impact-evaluation/ ; Lord, P., Poet, H., Roy, P., Smith, A., Marden, R., Styles, B., Oppedisano, V., Zhang, M., Dorsett R., Coulter, A., Sullivan, R. Ogunshakin S., and Matouse, R. Evaluation of year 1 of the National Tutoring Programme Tuition Partners and Academic Mentoring NFER. Accessed: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/evaluation-of-year-1-of-the-national-tutoring-programme/

[3] Lynch, S. Aston, K., Bradley E., Morton, C. Smith, A., Del Pozo Segura J.M. and Lord, P. (2023). Evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme Year 3: Implementation and Process Evaluation. NFER. Accessed: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-national-tutoring-programme-year-3-implementation-and-process-evaluation/

[4] Bierman, R., Mackay, S., Redondo, I.S. (2023). Evaluation of the 16-19 Tuition Fund Implementation and process evaluation report. Ipsos. Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64b6ac3b0ea2cb000d15e540/16-19_Tuition_Fund_IPE_Report_-_July_2023.pdf

[5] Department for Education. (2023). National Tutoring Programme funding. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-tutoring-programme-funding; Department for Education. (2024). 16 to 19 tuition fund 2023 to 2024 Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-tuition-fund-for-academic-year-2023-to-2024/16-to-19-tuition-fund-2023-to-2024

[6] EEF. (2025). Small group tuition Accessed: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition

HEADLINE CONCLUSIONS

In total, we draw eight main conclusions in this report, grouped into three themes:

Conception:

1. A national tutoring offer for schools and colleges in 2020 was the result of an unusual set of circumstances; it illustrates the strength of a combination of political leadership and an evidence base.
2. Tutoring meant different things to different people across its four-year lifespan; this probably harmed consistency of rollout of the schemes.

Rollout:

3. Covid capacity constraints also hampered elements of delivery of NTP over the four years of the programme.
4. The structure and implementation of 16-19TF overcame some of the challenges of NTP, but faced different obstacles and was not a perfect counterfactual.
5. The churn across government during the course of NTP and 16-19TF meant there was no consistent champion for tutoring in No.10, Treasury or DfE, and the Opposition made political capital from it.

Legacy:

6. Whilst tutoring has a strong theoretical evidence base, evaluation of the specific programmatical elements of NTP and 16-19 were not focused enough on the practical issues that settings wanted to know, and couldn't (and perhaps couldn't ever) identify all the causal impacts.
7. The volume of tutoring delivered in schools and colleges was successful to an extent that most (if not all) people would have seen as impossible at the outset.
8. Awareness of tutoring and sentiment towards it are positive across the board, but without an underpinning theory of change, it did not become the integrated element of the education system that (at least) some envisaged it would.

We think that these conclusions hold many lessons for a design of a future tutoring scheme. We also think many of the conclusions of what worked, and what didn't, could apply to other state-funded programmes.

METHODOLOGY

This report has been compiled, methodologically, via three routes:

- Approximately fifteen 1:1 interviews with key personnel involved in NTP and 16-19TF at various points during the four years of operation. These include former and current Ministers, MPs, civil servants, special advisers, policymakers, and others deeply involved in the design and oversight of the tutoring programmes.
- A roundtable session with tuition providers, and other organisations involved in tuition delivery, quality assurance, or evaluation during the four years of the programme.
- A roundtable session (and subsequent 1:1s) with a number of schools and colleges who participated in either NTP or 16-19TF.

In addition, we make use of several third-party reports, including that of the NAO, and newspaper analyses published either before, during, or after the development of NTP and 16-19TF, especially when they relate to the policy design and development, or conclusions as to its impact based on those choices.

Given the relatively small number of people involved in this project at this highest of levels, all participants have been anonymised throughout. In addition, and unique to this project, where people are quoted, we do not even give role titles (e.g. "former Minister", "Special Adviser", "former senior civil servant" "external tuition partner" and so on), given the significant possibility of identification by deduction. We have neatened up some quotations purely for readability; otherwise, we have left conclusions in participants' own voices and not applied any editorial judgement.

FINDINGS

1: A national tutoring offer for schools and colleges in 2020 was the result of an unusual set of circumstances; it illustrates the strength of a combination of political leadership and an existing evidence base to draw upon.

The announcement of a national tutoring scheme was first made in June 2020, as part of a £1bn Covid catch-up package. This gave £350m for tutoring in 2020/21 (what became the first year of NTP and 16-19TF).[7] A further £300m was announced in February 2021 alongside the appointment of Sir Kevan Collins as Education Recovery Commissioner.[8] In June 2021, the government announced a further £1bn for NTP and an expansion of 16-19TF for the three following years (2021/22 through to 2023/24).[9] This meant a total of just under £1.7bn was allocated for tutoring over the four years of the programmes, including £420m of government funding for 16-19TF (£96m for the 2020/21 academic year, £102m in 2021/22, £110m in 2022/23, and £112m in 2023/24)[10]. This was, however, less than what was deemed necessary by some, including Sir Kevan Collins, who resigned shortly after the June 2021 announcement.[11]

The centrality of tutoring to the education recovery announcements came about because of an almost unique confluence of circumstances:

First, **there was provision that existed already.** The majority of this was privately funded: Sutton Trust data suggests that in 2019, pre-pandemic, 27% of state school students reported ever having had tuition at some point, and 10% reported having had it that year. This data also showed that, unsurprisingly, more affluent schools and students, as well as those close to GCSE exams, were much more likely to have taken on private tuition.[12] Tutoring also had a geographical bias, with pupils in London significantly more likely to have received tutoring than those in other regions.[13]

Importantly, there was already some work in government looking at a handful of pilots of state-funded (or philanthropically funded) tutoring programmes in the UK, which meant there was a latent existing interest in the scheme.

"A very small number of people had been trying to get [tutoring] off the ground for a while...[if you look at the] Suffolk trial the EEF had done, which showed that if you match-funded Pupil Premium programmes and encourage people to take them up, shock, horror, there's a sort of stickiness over the following years, and you improve the choices schools are making.14 DfE tried and failed to get [tutoring] off the ground including tiny things, like a £1m pilot in the South West. Failure, failure, but... there was something to it."

There was also **an existing strong theoretical evidence base.** The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) toolkit identifies 1:1 tutoring as having 'high impact for moderate cost based on moderate evidence', with up to five months gain, and small group tuition as, 'moderate impact for low cost based on moderate evidence', with up to four months' gain.15 This proved to be vitally important in discussions and debates within government when deciding which interventions to back.

"In the famous EEF toolkit for 15 years, tutoring was one of those areas that - if done well - is a really strong evidence bet."

"Were it not for the [evidence base] on behalf of Tutor Trust and Action Tutoring, then I'm sure that the Treasury would never have been convinced that this was the initiative to put a billion or so pounds towards."

"[EEF was asked], 'What can government do on learning loss? What do you think we should do?' And [they] said, 'The best-evidenced thing is tutoring. Should we go away and work it up?' There was no bandwidth in government to think of anything proactive, [so EEF's job was] go work out what this could look like, come back, [and civil servants and advisers would try] to get it into the system."

There were **people both inside and outside government who believed in it.** Several of our interviewees noted that there was an extant interest within various government departments on forms of tuition as an intervention even pre-Covid, and that this spanned political parties, with the previous Labour government also having been interested in mechanism for state-funded tutoring as a way of closing attainment gaps (including making it a 2010 manifesto commitment). From his role as the Chair of the Education Select Committee, Robert Halfon campaigned for a tutoring programme.16 Externally, the Sutton Trust and EEF were strong public champions of tutoring and were involved in discussions before the announcement to shape what it might look like, as well as running the first year of the NTP.17 Other organisations such as Impetus and NESTA also played an important advocacy role (both publicly and privately) in making the case for tutoring in some form.18 All of this added weight to officials' and politicians' decisions when deciding how to spend various promised funds for Covid catch-up.

"Boris was saying things about tutoring, which was kind of interesting. It got a profile that actually you wouldn't have normally in the education sphere."

"Kevan [Collins] was the public face of it, but actually, it was a sort of Rishi-Boris conversation, and that's where the proper funding for tutoring came from."

"There was quite a high degree of trust. EEF was just going to run it well."

Simply having champions for an idea and a strong evidence base is not enough, of course. The other main reason for the development of a national programme at scale was **the unique political and spending environment driven by Covid.** Our interviewees discussed how there was, almost uniquely, a bidding-up process for funds where No. 10 asked the DfE for bigger proposals and ideas in the run-up to June 2020. Although this did not hold across all elements of the plan – with the Treasury in particular having been seen as key in watering down Sir Kevan Collins' widely reported plan for up to £15bn worth of catch-up in the run-up to the June 2021 announcement – there was clearly a significant political and economic demand for a substantial programme that could be launched rapidly.[19]

"NTP was government's big 'how can we help the greatest number of people possible using best evidence' thing… [DfE worked up] a £10m option, a £20m option, and argued internally whether it was ridiculous or not to have a £50m option. Then No.10 asked, 'how about a £1bn option?' It doesn't usually go like that."

"There were multiple chunks of the recovery plan. It totalled a billion or so, of which about £300m was for tutoring, and then something like £600m on the [Pupil] Premium. And this was already done before Kevan [Collins] came in."

"It was almost too much money, too soon."

Taken together, the combination of a strong evidence base, an opportunity, and political championing was key to the rapid funding and rollout of NTP and 16-19TF.

[7] Johnson, B. and Williamson, G. (2020). Billion pound Covid catch-up plan to tackle impact of lost teaching time. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/billion-pound-covid-catch-up-plan-to-tackle-impact-of-lost-teaching-time

[8] Johnson, B. and Williamson, G. (2021). New Commissioner appointed to oversee education catch-up. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-commissioner-appointed-to-oversee-education-catch-up

[9] Department for Education. (2021). Huge expansion of tutoring in next step of education recovery. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery

[10] Bierman, R., Mackay, S., Redondo, I.S. (2023). Evaluation of the 16-19 Tuition Fund Implementation and process evaluation report. Ipsos. Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64b6ac3b0ea2cb000d15e540/16-19_Tuition_Fund_IPE_Report_-_July_2023.pdf

[11] Weale, S. (2021). Education recovery chief quits in English schools catch-up row. Accessed: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jun/02/education-recovery-chief-kevan-collins-quit-english-schools-catch-up-row

[12] Cullinane, C. and Montacute, R. (2023). Tutoring – The New Landscape. Accessed: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Tutoring-The-New-Landscape.pdf

[13] Kirby, P. (2016). Shadow Schooling: Private tuition and social mobility in the UK. Accessed: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Shadow-Schooling-formatted-report_FINAL.pdf

[14] EEF. (2019). EEF publishes first scale-up evaluations. Accessed: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-publishes-first-scale-up-evaluations

[15] EEF. (2025). Small group tuition Accessed: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition

[16] Published letter from Rob Halfon MP to Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP, 12 June 2020

[17] Sutton Trust (2020). National Tutoring Programme launched to support pupils in schools across England. Accessed: https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/national-tutoring-programme/

[18] Impetus (2020). Partnership of charities and government will support schools to access to high-quality tutoring. Accessed: https://www.impetus.org.uk/national-tutoring-programme; NESTA (2020). National Tutoring Programme. Accessed: https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/national-tutoring-programme/

[19] Weale, S. (2021). Education recovery chief quits in English schools catch-up row. Accessed: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jun/02/education-recovery-chief-kevan-collins-quit-english-schools-catch-up-row

2: Tutoring meant different things to different people across its 4-year lifespan; this probably harmed consistency of rollout of the schemes.

Tutoring didn't emerge as one programme from Covid – as noted above, there were three distinct funding announcements from government over the course of a year, which between them funded respectively the first year, and then the second to fourth years of both NTP and 16-19TF. Reading the details as they emerge shows the development of the programme even from the early days, with for example the nomenclature of what became known as Tuition Partners and Academic Mentors changing between announcements.

This reflected, as many interviewees made clear, the speed at which decisions were taken and with which announcements were made on tutoring – in common with so much policymaking during Covid.

But more pertinently, it is possible to discern, through a large number of interviews, a distinct lack of consistency in what different departments, politicians and advisers thought that the tutoring announcements were buying, and what the purpose and theory of change behind the tutoring programmes were. In particular, we conclude that there were six main (accidental or deliberate) ambiguities right from the inception of the tutoring programmes – in particular NTP – which played out throughout the four years of funding:

Was tutoring designed as a four-year programme, or a ten-year to indefinite one? The various government announcements during the set-up of tuition funding show the different approaches. Ostensibly, most of the narrative is around Covid related catch up. The top-line government messaging accompanying every announcement of funding was about using the money to tackle lost teaching time during the pandemic: *'children and young people across England will be offered up to 100 million hours of free tuition to help them catch up on learning lost during the pandemic'*, and *'the government expects the £1 billion investment to transform the availability and approach to tuition in every school and college over the next three years.'*[20]

Yet at the same time, within the statements, there were declarations from the Secretary of State such as, *'the package will not just go a long way to boost children's learning in the wake of the disruption caused by the pandemic but also help bring back down the attainment gap that we've been working to eradicate'* – that is to say, indicating a longer-term vision.[21]

Similarly, in Kevan Collins' terms of reference, he was charged with *'[meeting] the ambition, as set out publicly by the Prime Minister, [that] students will catch up with lost learning over the course of this Parliament. Efforts to support education catch up will sit alongside and complement ongoing work on schools and post-16 reform. The Commissioner's advice will focus predominantly on catch-up actions.'*[22] In other words, there was also, right from the beginning, a view to the longer term.

Our interviewees reflected this divergence of view:

"I hoped the NTP would deliver (which it hasn't as yet) a permanent shift in the educational landscape."

"It was a pretty successful, pretty widely implemented recovery programme that had decent evidence."

"You could have had a much more clearly defined policy in terms of who it's trying to reach and what it's trying to achieve."

"It got branded as just a catch-up programme, but from an education perspective, it was always seen as something which was designed to set the groundwork for a more fundamental change."

"I mean, there was always hope that there would be best practice taken for this and if it impacted results, schools and colleges might think 'we'll keep doing this, it's having an impact'. But there wasn't that kind of long-term strategy of a subsidy. It really was a pandemic response."

Was NTP about hitting numbers, or market making? Again, it is clear that the flagship narrative was about volume of tutoring – and a commitment made by the Prime Minister and Secretary of State at the time to deliver six million sessions over the four years of funding. But for some within government, the idea was as much about building an infrastructure that allowed tuition to be delivered in schools across the country as much as (or more than) raw numbers. It was this, for example, that led to a central approach of quality assuring external partners in Year 1, with at least one eye on the geographical reach of provision. The expansion of tutoring to a school-led route in Year 2, while in part a reflection of school demands, was also seen as a way of boosting the capacity of the system in areas where external providers could not or would not operate at scale.

Our interviewees were themselves split on whether the main purpose of the scheme was market-making or numbers.

"If you keep things tighter and allow appropriate flex, you have more chance of sustaining quality standards in the long run, so I think you have to keep up that bit of the market such that some of the benefits of it continue to go through...some of the norms will have been established in schools, and that's a massive positive and a massive success"

"Has it revolutionised the tutoring market, completely overthrown it? That was never really what it was for..."

"Integration [of providers to the school system] wasn't baked in. This wasn't about pandemic recovery; it was an evidence-based school improvement model! This needed a ten-year view…this is mainstream now. Make the case for the marginal pound and what tutoring is substituting for."

Was tutoring meant to be delivered by external partners, internally within schools and colleges, or a mix? Our interviewees were split on whether the scale delivery model for tutoring was always going to shift to a mixed model, or whether this came about because of a series of weaknesses identified in Year 1 – uneven distribution of capacity across the country, and a desire among schools to use their own staff, who knew their students well. This certainly became a clear demand among schools and school leaders, and most of our interviewees agreed it made sense to have made this shift, but were split on whether this was always an intention.

Additionally, some of the delivery in Year 2 became even more blurred, where external providers were commissioned technically through the school-led route, as opposed to through the central portal of Randstad, the Year 2 central providers; again, there were differing views on whether this was a sensible evolution of the system or reflected weaknesses in commissioning architecture, which led to frustration from schools and also external providers who worked together to circumnavigate the system.

"It was slightly an irrelevance. As a provider, you could sell into the provider route or the school-led route. The routes basically were irrelevant. It was because of the unions. All tutoring has to be school-led. That's obvious."

"Schools had differing experiences of tutoring. There were some companies that literally just turned up at the front gates. The university-led programme by contrast worked very closely with teachers. In many cases, [tutoring] was done to [schools and colleges], not done with them, by providers that were just not used to it"

"Schools as deliverers – I think [government] underestimated or under-thought how they would want to do it, essentially. So I think any future model, if you're designing again, would have to at least be a mixed economy of school-based and externally based tutoring providers"

"[There was] a lot of popularity for [the school-led route] because it was what schools had been asking for. There was a very high level of satisfaction from school leaders and tutors, and a high level of impact in terms of improvements in attainment and socio-economic diversity"

To what extent was tutoring means to be focused on disadvantage? The first year of the NTP included an expectation that it would be focused on the most disadvantaged, with a target of 65% of tutoring being delivered to Pupil Premium children, given the evidence that Covid lockdowns were having a disproportionate impact on that group.[23] The initial target for deprivation was subsequently dropped in Year 2, with both years criticised for a lack of reach to such students.[24] Overall, 47% of those reached by the NTP in both Year 1 and Year 2 were disadvantaged.[25]

In discussion, many of our interviewees felt that there ought to have been more of an explicit focus on disadvantage in NTP, and several lamented the formal dropping of a deprivation-focused target, with some thinking that this was to facilitate a greater volume of tuition overall. However, others argued that the element of greater flexibility and discretion for heads was actually beneficial, in that it avoided edge cases not being eligible for funding even when they would have benefited. Our policy and political interviewees were also split on whether the explicit disadvantage focus was ever an intention.

"There was definitely some confusion from schools when the Pupil Premium target was eased off as to whether funding was being based on their number of Pupil Premium students or how much was going to Pupil Premium students - there was a lot of mixed messaging"

"Schools knew their students. They would look at SEND students or they would look at students who weren't Pupil Premium-eligible but were still in need. Schools for the most part understood that focus on Pupil Premium-eligible students, but also appreciated that flexibility, because it allowed them to focus on the students who they thought needed it."

"There will always be young people in a school that are not in receipt of Pupil Premium or Free School Meals, but have an absolutely desperate home life, and absolutely need this intervention. So schools always need a bit of wriggle room to say, 'I put this person on the list for a good reason', and you can't ever go for the black-and-white, computer-says-no approach. But for me, that's a percentage or two around the edges, not 50, 60 percent."

"I remember the STAG [tutoring advisory group to the Department of Education] saying 'Oh, it is really difficult, because not all children that are disadvantaged are caught by the criteria', which is true, but I think government could have done things that capture the people you need to and then you've got discretion when someone's on the borderline or whatever, but it just muddied the waters a bit too much"

In comparison, it was always clear for interviewees that 16-19 tuition was always going to be focused on disadvantage – but that at the same time, the lack of a clear identification point comparable to Pupil Premium eligibility (which stops at 16) meant that there was always flexibility built into the scheme from the beginning.

"With colleges, [government] just kind of wanted to get it out of the door, meaning government didn't track who got tutored, in what size classes, what did they receive, how long did it go on for - all of that was completely lost. Occasionally colleges will say "tutoring sounds great, but we've had a bad experience'."

Was the intention for tutoring to become wholly school/college funded or not?

The government was always clear that tuition funding was for four years, and that subsequent school and college tuition programmes would need to be funded from core programmes, most notably Pupil Premium funding in schools. But there were significant concerns that such an approach was unlikely to be deliverable at scale, given the competing pressures on Pupil Premium, with 47% of leaders already using that funding to plug general budget gaps.[26] Various research showed that cost pressures are consistently cited as the main reason to not to carry on tutoring in schools or colleges (with the latter of course not having Pupil Premium or an equivalent for 16–19-year-olds).[27] Government at various points made claims that NTP and 16-19TF would lead to a 'vibrant tutoring market' and that tutoring would become 'a permanent feature of the system.'[28]

Our interviewees were privately split on whether it was ever a realistic assumption that tutoring would continue at scale in the absence of dedicated funding.

"There would have been many challenges, including how funding would have continued in the long term. Was the tapering idea that people would have ended up following realistic?"

"There were genuine challenges [with the idea of funding into the medium term]"

"Schools were just cobbling together what they could with the money that they found they had last minute once the funding was gone."

"The DfE have a disconnect between them and the schools. The reality was that schools couldn't afford it once the money had gone. It seems government didn't talk to the right people."

This ambiguity over key design concepts and theory of change probably aided sign-off in the short term, at a time of high pressure and short timescales to make decisions. However, the lack of clarity - and shared understanding - of the programmes meant it was harder to steer a consistent course as the programme evolved, and as personnel changed. It also hindered the identification of clear success criteria.

[20] Department for Education (2021). Huge expansion of tutoring in next step of education recovery. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery

[21] Ibid,.

[22] Department for Education. (2021). Education Recovery Commissioner: role specification and terms of reference. Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602411e1e90e0711c7b92f72/Terms_of_reference.pdf

[23] Department for Education. (2020). National Tutoring Programme: guidance for schools. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-tutoring-programme-guidance-for-schools-academic-year-202324/a1a14051-3466-49ec-9213-e65abb0287b8

[24] Adams, R. (2022). National tutoring scheme failing disadvantaged pupils, say MPs. Accessed: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/mar/10/national-tutoring-scheme-failing-disadvantaged-pupils-say-mps

[25] National Audit Office. (2023). Education recovery in schools in England. Accessed: https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/education-recovery-in-schools-in-england/

[26] K. Latham. (2024). Too early to call time on the NTP. Sutton Trust. Accessed: https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/too-early-to-call-time-on-the-ntp/

[27] Burtonshaw, S. and Simons, J. (2023). Future of Tutoring. Public First. Accessed: https://impetus-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/publications/The-Future-of-Tutoring.pdf

[28] Booth, S. (2024). A 'vibrant tutor market'? Providers wind down as NTP closes. Schools Week. Accessed: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-vibrant-tutor-market-providers-wind-down-as-ntp-closes/

3: Covid capacity constraints also hampered elements of delivery of NTP over the four years of the programme.

In the first year of the programme, the EEF oversaw a process of quality assuring providers that wanted to deliver state-funded tutoring. Because of the emphasis on quality, the EEF only awarded 32 contracts for tuition partners, with an estimated 15,000 tutors, alongside 188 academic mentors trained and recruited by Teach First (who were salaried staff directly placed into schools to act as more intensive academic support).[29] Because of this relatively limited capacity, the announcement coming after the start of the school year (with schools able to access tuition from 2 November 2020), and the geographic constraints of providers, capacity was relatively limited in Year 1.

Infamously, the second year of NTP, which moved to a fully-procured model for a central provider under Randstad (having awarded the Year 1 contract to the EEF, and Teach First, under a direct award that was reflective of government's existing relationships with those bodies and the need to operate the scheme at speed), ran into several issues. As our interviewees told us (at some length), there were multiple issues in Year 2, including challenges with the initial procurement, delivery system difficulties, school and college concerns about operationalising the system, and the domain expertise of the main provider.

"One big regret is government was doing Covid recovery stuff at exactly the same time as the re-procurement was happening. Civil servants were working 17, 18, 19 hours a day trying to get the recovery stuff over the line, and just having to trust that this procurement was not going to get completely stuffed up.."

"You couldn't have designed a worse onboarding process [for schools from Randstad]. It was a hell show that wasted too much time and energy and money that could have made a difference. It tainted the experience for schools."

"At the end of the day, it was not the right partner, and I think, frankly, [Ministers] ought to have questioned whether having one partner in that big a position (even if it had been a highly experienced educational partner) would have been the right thing to do anyway."

Ultimately, Randstad's contract with the Department for Education was terminated at the end of Year 2, with the vast majority of funding moved under the control of schools and colleges, and with Tribal and EDT playing a smaller system management role.[30]

Although Year 2 and the role of Randstad is often seen in the sector as the pivotal issue with NTP rollout, our interviewees paint a more nuanced picture, with broader challenges than just the weaknesses of the main contractor in Year 2. Instead, we conclude that the rapid changes to NTP on an annual basis led to loss of faith in both government and school system to deliver effective tutoring. Moreover, after the introduction of the scheme, not enough time was put into delivery and overall implementation with schools and small-p political management of the overall programme.

This is for several reasons. First, **DfE–education system relations were poor** throughout much of this period, with an unpopular Secretary of State and a loss of trust because of wider Covid recovery plans.

"[Tutoring] was not a DfE programme. It had no sponsor, except for Boris, who got a bit caught up with other things. And so when things hit the rocks in terms of delivery, there was nobody in DfE who had ownership of the policy...Above [a certain level] in the Civil Service, nobody wanted it."

Second, **there was no wider parent advocacy.** As one of our interviewees told us, the lack of a countervailing voice advocating for tuition meant that the dominant narrative was one of concerns about tutoring, and a push to increase flexibility and loosen pressures on schools and colleges, and not to constantly drive for scale.

"Where was the parent voice…people saying 'where's my tutoring?' There was no pressure on schools who weren't doing tutoring to do it. There was no comms campaign from government. No pressure like there is from parents who are promised a 2-year-old offer in childcare and can't get it."

Third, **wider bandwidth issues with DfE also hampered their ability to manage programme.** Because of the constant pressure during lockdown and reopening of schools in Year 1, and wider system challenges throughout the period, there was insufficient time given to lead-in announcements for tutoring. As one example cited to us, funding announcements were made too late to schools, hampering their ability to build it into their own budget planning and meaning that often, tutoring funding couldn't be effectively spent.

"Nowhere near enough time was spent on winning hearts and minds with schools and explaining how this would work."

"Announcements were made too late and not synched to funding, so even schools and colleges that were really positive about this couldn't engage properly…then providers laid staff off so there wasn't any capacity to build up again quickly. There was just no certainty."

"Not enough work was done on supply and capability in tutoring cold spots – compare [this] to the childcare announcement and government as a market maker there."

Fourth, given the stresses of Covid, reopening schools, and then dealing with learning loss, **there was little headspace in schools and colleges to fix issues that emerged in the delivery of tuition**, except for those heads and principals most firmly committed to it. When faced with high frictional costs (e.g. to commission an external provider or navigate a portal), many schools decided simply to give up.

"I think government underestimated the bandwidth required for the additional complexity from a school's perspective - having an external provider come in can be a drawback from their perspective."

Fifth, **the clawback system for NTP, designed to maintain value for money during Covid, caused real issues in schools because the market wasn't mature: some providers and schools just gave up.** The idea of NTP operating as a subsidy, tapering away over time, was that schools would gradually integrate it into their budget planning. But for schools who didn't have great familiarity with tuition, the challenges of claiming funds and matching them was often too much. This was especially the case in smaller schools, or schools with low NTP allocations, or where there weren't many options for external provision. The gradual tapering then caused additional issues, because the assumed bedding in of tuition didn't happen as was forecast. While it is logical that a school who had benefited from tuition would stick with it even as government subsidy tapered away, for schools that hadn't yet started, every year it became more and more of a challenge to start a new programme when the funding became less and less.

Our interviewees had many views on the tapering of funding (covered elsewhere), but everyone agreed it added friction to the system, as well as political embarrassment when hundreds of millions of pounds were left unspent and handed back to the Treasury every year.[31]

"The most unpopular bit of the system was when funding tapered off and then the mainstream and PP funding [was meant to] pick it up…and then the [national] underspends happen!"

Lastly, the policy view that school funding could be flexed and matched to a declining level of government subsidy was **unlucky in that tapering came at the same time as much higher inflation and cost of living hit the school system.** School budgets came under increasing pressure during the four years of tuition (as did FE budgets during 16-19TF, though that had no matching requirements) and therefore, while it is conceivable that in different circumstances, tuition would have been fundable, it was practically difficult for many schools even had they wanted to do it.

In short, while the Covid and post-Covid environment in England led to the introduction of tutoring, it also significantly constricted bandwidth to deliver a scalable programme.

[30] Booth, S. and Dickens, J. (2022). Tutor cash will go straight to schools as Randstad AXED. Accessed: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/tutor-cash-will-go-straight-to-schools-as-randstad-axed/

[31] Booth, S. (2024). £134m unspent tutoring cash clawed back (and will fund teacher pay deal). Schools Week. Accessed: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/134m-unspent-tutoring-cash-clawed-back-and-will-fund-teacher-pay-deal/

4: The structure and implementation of 16-19TF overcame some of the challenges of NTP, but faced different obstacles and was not a perfect counterfactual.

Many interviewees with experience of NTP pointed to the different delivery architecture and choices underpinning 16-19TF, and argued that this represented an alternative way of conceptualising a tutoring scheme. It is certainly true that the scheme operated in a simpler way:

- There were no matching requirements from colleges to the 16-19 tuition money.
- There were very limited requirements on eligibility of students.
- It had looser accountability metrics (an annual statement, similar to that of Pupil Premium, reporting what the college had spent its money on).

In interviews, it was made clear to us that these design choices were deliberate, reflecting a view that there was lower funding capacity in colleges, as well as no equivalent to Pupil Premium for targeting purposes. But interestingly, it was also the view that there was no deliberate comparison between the two schemes in terms of policy design from officials and Ministers.

"It wasn't particularly that DfE consciously thought about a different design - with [a less centralised pot of funding being better] at the time. It was more about the independence of colleges"

"It's not something where [DfE] would have sat down and said, 'these things should be aligned and be the same'. The nature of the sectors is really quite different."

"[As regards 16-19TF] there was a very clear sense that government didn't want to create [additional workload] given the circumstances, and that colleges were already very much of under pressure at the time in terms of funding and resources... government didn't want to put a huge amount of accountability and reporting around the fund. There was a conscious decision taken to generally trust the profession to know what's best for their students. And accountability was more around financial reporting rather than quality [of provision]"

But our interviews also make clear that there were other issues in 16-19TF that mean it isn't as simple as offering this as a counterfactual.

First, it did still suffer because of college bandwidth.

"Because the pandemic was ongoing for the first few months, [college principals] just didn't have the headspace to be aware that funding was available"

Second, the loose conditions of funding led to some odd decisions, e.g. large group sizes, and some activities being delivered that arguably could not be considered tutoring.

"There was so little accountability for quality. I heard about one group of 12 people, which is just a small class. It was good that it was got out of the door quickly, but there was no accountability whatsoever, really."

"Where there was some difficulty was group sizes. [The rules on 16-19TF] group sizes had been loosened a little bit based on feedback from colleges and sixth forms, so that it would be difficult to deliver the kind of small groups the evidence said were best. [The guidance allowed for] groups of five or less, but it could be seven in exceptional circumstances, and a lot of colleges used that kind of 'exceptional circumstances' to be the pandemic. So in terms of group sizes, there wasn't as much fidelity with what the evidence said and what government might have wanted there to be."

"The one-to-many model was pushed really hard to get bigger numbers. It ended up looking like a private school in a college – that's good, but it's not tutoring!"

Third, the loose accountability requirements meant that the statement of what colleges did was sometimes very vague.

"There was quite a lot of variation in how it was delivered and what it was delivered for. The [DfE] steer was that English and maths should be prioritised, but it could actually be delivered in any subject."

"The idea behind [statements of activity] was that colleges have to think about how they deliver it and publish a plan of how it would be delivered. But in reality, the department didn't have capacity to look through statements from every college…. I heard it was something like a 10% check. For that element of the policy there wasn't as high a compliance. And DfE effectively quietly dropped the requirement after the first year because government's main focus was on the quality of the tutoring rather than a published statement."

"They tended to be quite generic, to be honest. The published statements were of varying degrees of quality."

Having said that, it is also true that the disadvantage measures which determined eligibility for 16-19TF, and the reporting which DfE required from colleges, was very specific - and probably offered less flexibility than that for schools under NTP – as the final year worth of guidance on eligibility and reporting makes clear.[32]

It seems clear that the main differences between the 16-19TF and the NTP were that there was more flexibility around subject delivery for the latter – reflecting that colleges deliver more subjects - and tuition was setting-led from the start. In addition, the government took more notice – potentially, a more accurate and sympathetic notice – to the particular challenges facing FE in that period, when designing the delivery and requirements on the scheme.

It is likely that the relative speed and flexibility of the 16-19TF funding model was appreciated and worked well – but it also seems likely that any future scheme in either schools or colleges would need to take account of the weaknesses identified in some provision as a result of such flexibility.

[32] Department for Education. (2024). 16 to 19 tuition fund for academic year 2023 to 2024 Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-tuition-fund-for-academic-year-2023-to-2024

5: The churn across government during the course of NTP and 16-19TF meant that there was no consistent champion for tutoring in No.10, Treasury or DfE, and the Opposition made political capital from it.

In June 2020 the Prime Minister was Boris Johnson, the Secretary of State for Education was (now Sir) Gavin Williamson, and the Chancellor was Rishi Sunak. By the time that funding ended in summer 2024 (pre-election), the UK had gone through two more Prime Ministers, three more Chancellors, and five more Secretaries of State for Education (as well as myriad junior Ministers within DfE). By the time the school term officially ended, the country had also changed governing party to a Labour administration, who inherited the programmes and all accompanying funding just before they formally ran out at the end of the academic year.

Our interviewees were clear that a significant movement of personnel at political and official level caused problems for the oversight of tuition, and the successful delivery of it. This manifested in several ways.

First, No10 support was initially helpful, but arguably caused difficulty over time because there was a (disputed) level of DfE support for the scheme. One of the most interesting aspects of our analysis revolves around the different levels of organisational support for the concept of NTP and 16-19TF. Our interviewees were clear that there was initially a confluence of people from across DfE and No10 (and externally) all converging on tutoring. But there is dispute over who the primary actors were in achieving the initial announcements in 2020 and 2021 - No10, or the DfE. This matters because, as covered below, opinions and enthusiasm cooled over time.

"DfE were too doveish…. they conceded to schools and unions too quickly [on schools who didn't want to do it]."

"Boris didn't give No.10 Policy Unit or the political people any heft, so No.10 didn't have the power to push the Department."

"Where was the link drawn in government between tutoring and wider school reform? A compromise was made that NTP would just continue like it did. There was no push to a wider story on English and maths resits or failing schools."

"You just didn't have the normal structures of anything...the feeling of it being a really good bet, but it then also must have gone into the body of the Department to be working through it"

Second, the role of the Treasury is important. **Most interviewees concurred that initially there was Treasury support (and indeed the initial funding received full Chancellor backing).** For all that our interviewees from across the sector disliked the matching system of funding and various other financial controls, our policy interviewees recognised this as a necessary step. But over time, Treasury interest also waned, especially as underspends started occurring. Our interviewees thought there were always low prospects of Treasury changing their financial hawkishness towards tutoring beyond the 'wins' of the NTP subsidy in Year 4 being maintained at 50%, and that this hampered any prospect of seriously considering an extension or recalibration of tutoring beyond the original conception of NTP and 16-19TF.

"You had to play the system to avoid the clawback"

"There was no world in which the Treasury were going to let the money out the door that didn't have some conditions on it. People will argue, with total reason, that those conditions were a drag on delivery, but there was no money without those conditions"

"With any large government investment, there's a feeling from the Treasury that 'we've given you a lot of money, we need to see that it's successful, and you ought to be grateful that we've given you a lot of money'. And I think given that backdrop, they probably felt that wasn't really the case. From their perspective, it may have looked like the educational establishment was a little bit ungrateful, that all this extra money had been spent, and it was spending its time complaining that there wasn't more."

"It was seen as a massive win [within government] to allow for a 50% subsidy to remain for a further year [for NTP]"

Some people told us that DfE lost a lot of enthusiasm for the programme (especially after Year 2 problems) at both political and official level, and it became significantly less of a departmental priority. Some interviewees also thought that DfE officials were also exhausted and had no desire to think about a shift out of Covid crisis mode into long-term programme implementation.

"The Department couldn't transition from emergency mode and the chaos of Covid. By 2022, 2023, things were quite normal, but the Department was still in emergency response mode."

"DfE would go into No10 for a stocktake, led by [the Director-General]. The PM would ask what was happening on tutoring and was the Department calling schools who weren't taking it up. Then a week later, officials and advisers follow up…oh, nothing is happening. You put 10 people on this for a week, making 100 calls each, suddenly you can speak to half the secondary schools in the country who aren't doing tutoring, but that didn't happen."

"Gillian Keegan was putting out fires in other ways. If I think about the things that her time was taken up with, in terms of industrial action and RAAC and the things that were really cutting through and making the headlines, [tutoring] just got lost, with lots of other things going on."

At the same time as implementation issues were hampering the schemes, especially from Year 2 onwards, Labour were making headway out of criticising tutoring, mostly around implementation and clawbacks.[33] This also probably led to a political distancing of government from the scheme – or at best a desire to fix problems quietly, rather than shout loudly about successes, especially as the programmes' original political champions had moved on.

"Ultimately, my experience is, if the politics have been in the right place, none of [the policy challenges] would have really mattered. So if Jeremy Hunt, at the time, had been a big fan of tutoring, or Gillian Keegan had decided to really push tutoring as her thing with the right No 10 support, then it would have been completely different. But it just had no political champions."

Essentially, tutoring moved from being an asset for the government to something of a millstone from around Year 2 onwards, and this hampered the ability or willingness of the government to address concerns. It also lessened the chances of Labour committing to extending the schemes either while in Opposition or after assuming office, having been vocal critics of it.

[33] Weale, S. and Adams, R. (2022). National tutoring programme has failed pupils and taxpayers, says Labour. Guardian.
Accessed: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jan/11/national-tutoring-programme-has-failed-pupils-and-taxpayers-says-labour

6: Whilst tutoring has a strong theoretical evidence base, evaluation of the specific programmatical elements of NTP and 16-19 were not focused enough on the practical issues which settings want to know, or couldn't (and perhaps couldn't ever) identify all the causal impacts.

As discussed above, the initial strong evidence base for tutoring, drawn from the EEF, was a significant reason for it being the centrepiece of a Covid recovery plan. It was also very clear that the new, nationally-scaled programme for schools and colleges would need to be evaluated, and that it offered a massive opportunity to demonstrate the benefits at scale and in real-world environments. This was particularly important to those who saw the potential for tutoring to become a new staple of the school and college system. As Ben Styles from NFER put it, 'the [EEF] evidence was collected from a series of small-scale studies undertaken in 'ideal' (research) conditions and doesn't automatically apply to the effectiveness of a national programme involving a myriad of tutoring methods, academic subjects and year groups.'[34]

After four years of funded tutoring, on the one hand we know a lot more, with four national evaluations of NTP and one year's evaluation of 16-19TF.[35] At the same time, global evidence on tutoring has also grown, including from other countries who also embedded catch up and tutoring scheme as part of their pandemic recovery efforts.[36]

On the other hand, there are some concerns as to what we have truly learned from the annual NTP evaluations. This is partly because the system changed from year to year, making any longitudinal comparisons moot. It is partly because data quality, particularly in Year 2, was poor. And it is partly because the set-up of tutoring was so complex that it was simply not possible – and may never have been possible – to identify the causal impacts of different models of tutoring to different groups of students, all happening simultaneously.

"The evaluation was really struggling to find positive findings, not because there wasn't positive stuff to find, just because it was trying to do something impossible, given the dilution and stuff involved."

On the 16-19TF, only one evaluation has ever been published – focusing on the 2021/22 academic year.[37]

Despite the Department for Education saying in 2023 that they are "evaluating the [16-19] Tuition Fund"; such an evaluation has not been published to date.[38]

Some people have argued that the scale of the evaluation and expectation was too high for tutoring – attempting to identify a wholly causal model. But our interviewees didn't hold to that, arguing that because tutoring's efficacy was a major part of the case for change and initial funding, it should have been held to that high standard.

Nevertheless, our interviewees also thought that the was too much focus on a single, comprehensive evaluation of the impact of NTP (and 16-19TF), and less on what elements of it really worked. The programme would probably have benefited from a theory of change model, not a fully causal model, such that questions that stakeholders were asking government about dosage, target group, duration, cost, and so on could have been more comprehensively evaluated.

"I would have just gone for a theory of change model. Evidence is really strong for tutoring, so we can make a good bet that if these things are in place in schools, and we can check those things like group size and dosage, that it's having a positive impact...instead of those impact questions, we could have been putting capacity into the kind of projects that STAG was really advocating for, about actually building evidence based on what makes good quality tutoring through smaller-scale studies and stuff, rather than trying to measure the impact of, like, two million courses in the school system, which was just bonkers."

"There was no impact research done that is helpful to schools. It needed a much bigger push on the key questions – who, what, when, how many kids. It could have been done quicker and more agile – 20% to 40% of the time taken. But DfE didn't want to do this."

"Why wasn't it done like laptop rollout? Best practice shared from the sector to the sector."

[34] Styles, B. (2024). NTP: What we've learned – and haven't – about tutoring's impact. Schools Week.
Accessed: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ntp-what-weve-learned-and-havent-about-tutorings-impact/

[35] Biermann, R., et al (2023). Evaluation of the 16-19 Tuition Fund. Department for Education (DfE).
Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64b6ac3b0ea2cb000d15e540/16-19_Tuition_Fund_IPE_Report_-_July_2023.pdf;
Lord, P., et al (2022). Evaluation of year 1 of the National Tutoring Programme Tuition Partners and Academic Mentors. NFER.
Accessed: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/evaluation-of-year-1-of-the-national-tutoring-programme/;
Lucas, M., et al (2023). Independent Evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme Year 2: Impact Evaluation. DfE.
Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6530d24692895c0010dcba04/Independent_Evaluation_of_the_National_Tutoring_Programme_Year_2_Impact_Evaluation.pdf
Moore, E., et al (2024). National Tutoring Programme Year 3: Impact Report. DfE.
Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f2e30d7da73f17177640e8/National_Tutoring_Programme_year_3_impact_evaluation_-_Sep_24.pdf;
Lynch, S., et al (2024). National Tutoring Programme – Evaluations and Reflections. DfE.
Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e2c1f46cc3c902a6e6fbed/National_Tutoring_Programme_-_evaluation_and_reflection.pdf

[36] Styles, B. (2024). NTP: What we've learned – and haven't – about tutoring's impact. Schools Week.
Accessed: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ntp-what-weve-learned-and-havent-about-tutorings-impact/

[37] Bierman, R., Mackay, S., Redondo, I.S. (2023). Evaluation of the 16-19 Tuition Fund Implementation and process evaluation report. Ipsos.
Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64b6ac3b0ea2cb000d15e540/16-19_Tuition_Fund_IPE_Report_-_July_2023.pdf

[38] Gibb, N. (2023). UK Parliament, WQ for Department for Education. Accessed: https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-16/202768

7: The volume of tutoring delivered in schools and colleges was successful to an extent that most (if not all) people would have seen as impossible at the outset.

There was a strong consensus from our interviewees that despite many of the challenges of implementation, state-funded tutoring had achieved something remarkable in its scale. The initial target set by the former Prime Minister of six million sessions was felt to be totally implausible at the time, but that eventually, the final number was achieved.

Most interviewees agreed that having a large number, committed to publicly, did help the scheme progress. For example, it acted as a forcing mechanism to explore which schools and colleges weren't engaging with tutoring, and to try to get them to engage. Where people were critical of the target process, it was felt that this led to an increasingly adversarial relationship between DfE and No10, or between government and the wider education sector (when school leaders complained about being badgered from civil servants), or that it exacerbated the embarrassment when clawback figures were announced.

There is a strong sense that the school led route of NTP (which of course was the delivery model operated from the beginning in 16-19TF) was a really important development from Year 2 onwards in achieving volume. It undoubtedly drove up numbers of children participating in tutoring, especially as it became increasingly clear that external providers simply weren't able or willing to offer 100% geographical coverage, particularly for small schools.

There was some initial discontent as to the principle of school-led tutoring when it was first contemplated.

"Wasn't the point that some of these schools didn't have capacity or capability to do catch up in the first place? It's not just money. So like external school improvement, [school-led] works when you can broker in external support, and it's not just giving money to TAs with dubious beliefs about the efficacy of that."

"The initial plan for Year 2 procurement was only for Academic Mentors and Tuition Partners, and the school-led route was worked up and invented in the background – so while mentors and partners were designed to complement each other, school-led route wasn't – indeed, it was effectively designed to allow schools to bypass the constraints in the mentors and partners options even when those constraints were integral to the prospect of impact"

"[School-led] was a political thing - DfE and schools/unions were at loggerheads about so many things at this point, and Ministers didn't care about NTP so effectively conceded to schools demands on this [school-led route]";

But looking back, there is broad agreement that it worked well in most instances, and that it was crucial to delivering school engagement.

"The school-led route was a thing that Kevan was really keen to push. There's often a sense of EEF purists versus sort of just making it work, but to get the numbers government wanted to get to, it needed a vehicle that wasn't 30-odd different companies or the Teach First model."

"It's interesting just how central school-led tutoring ended up being. It felt like a lot of schools were genuinely running their own tutoring programmes, and [initial plans for tutoring] completely underestimated their preference for doing that."

It was also pointed out that this move was a point of accommodation with NAHT and ASCL, who had been advocating consistency for greater flexibility of NTP funding in this way[39]. And it acted as a backdoor pay rise for some college and school staff at a time when pay was relatively low and staff had low morale, and also acted to upskill some other staff such as HLTAs. Furthermore, given the weaknesses of the central system in Year 2, there was a blurred line between school-led provision and external provision – where provision sometimes referred to how the tutoring was commissioned, and sometimes to how it was delivered.

"Some schools ended up seeing [the 50% subsidy] as a way of offsetting their existing costs by just saying 'Mrs Smith I'm afraid is no longer going to be a teaching assistant in our school, but we are really pleased to say that from next Monday, Mrs Smith will now be a tutor, working with exactly the same children, doing exactly the same thing'."

[39] See for example NAHT, 17 June 2021. Tutoring is a top priority for education recovery – but not via the National Tutoring Programme, say school leaders. Accessed https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/News/ArtMID/556/ArticleID/1009?

8: Awareness of tutoring and sentiment towards it are positive across the board, but without an underpinning theory of change, it did not become the integrated element of the education system that (at least) some envisaged it would.

Tutoring remains an intervention which has a high degree of support from school and college leaders, parents, and students themselves.[40] Indeed, the extent to which tutoring remained an option delivered by many schools and colleges, even as funding tapered down through NTP, shows the belief that any school leaders have in it as an intervention. As the Sutton Trust conclude, *"NTP remains popular among school leaders. Our polling has found that, despite government cuts to NTP funding this year, almost half of school leaders said they still used it over the last year for either tuition partners, academic mentors or for school-led tutoring sourced locally. In fact, there was a slight increase among secondary senior leaders using the NTP, up to 58% compared to 56% in 2023."*[41]

Similarly, the NfER evaluation of NTP Year 4 (2023/24) asked respondents about a culture of tutoring in schools.[42] This showed, unsurprisingly, that those opting into the scheme (and therefore paying from their own budgets alongside funding) had a stronger feeling of having embedded tutoring into their own schools. But it also shows that for those leaders, they were not simply offering tutoring because the funding was there. When leaders report that staff have a positive view of tutoring, and that it is aligned to the curriculum, and that they have a culture of tutoring in the school, and that they have parent buy-in, all this clearly shows impact beyond a time-limited funding stream.

Lack of funding is the most commonly cited reason for schools not continuing with tutoring after the end of the funding. This shows, as NFER conclude, that *'tutoring is heavily reliant on the availability of ring-fenced funding and the flexibility of its use.'*[43] In other words, it is possible to conclude both that tutoring has been embedded beyond schools and colleges simply using their time-limited funding, but also that the absence of that funding isn't yet leading to anything close to a majority of settings paying for such tutoring from their own budgets. In fact, only 15% of school leaders interviewed by NFER said that they would be very likely to offer such tuition in the future without any funding.[44]

Our interviewees disagreed over whether it was ever plausible that Pupil Premium would replace NTP funding in schools – and there is no equivalent stream in colleges. Some felt that the case should have been made for a longer time period of funding for tutoring (whether wrapped into core funding, or into Pupil Premium and some 16-19 equivalent, or via a continued additionally identified grant).

"If government did want to achieve that ambition – and that was certainly set out by Nadim Zahawi when he was Secretary of State – that there should be a cultural change where tutoring is no longer something for better-off people but something for the whole sector to use effectively, [then] that needs to be funded effectively. And the Pupil Premium can't be the only way of doing that, because the Pupil Premium has an awful lot of burdens to bear"

"I would embed [Pupil Premium accountability] into things like Ofsted inspections. You've got to be really careful with this stuff, but I would have a question in the new inspection framework around how schools have spent their Pupil Premium, and can you tell us how it's worked for your children. And if it isn't convincing, and tutoring is not part of that response, then I think you would need to ask that school or trust why that is so."

From the perspective of 16-19TF, our respondents identify a number of issues which need to be addressed to make it a core element of FE provision. This includes the place of catch up support practical subjects, for example, which clearly became a necessity under the Covid "catch up" remit but could be subject to debate for a longer-term plan; the reporting burden in FE (linked to the lack of a disadvantage premium and therefore an easy indicator of student eligibility); a lack of accounting for logistical issues relating to the way college timetables are structured (9.00-5.00, 3 days per week for most students); and the extremely diffuse nature of delivery (linked to the range of subjects and courses that could be supported). FE leaders we have spoken to for this report give a similarly positive message as to the benefits of tutoring and catch up as a permanent part of the college landscape, but a wider theory of change for a non-Covid time needs to be developed.

For those who felt the intention was always to make tutoring a permanent part of the landscape, perhaps the biggest criticism is that NTP and 16-19TF never was delivered consistently enough to make that case to school and college leaders, such that they would continue it after the end of the time limited funding.

"It's vandalism. Schools are still doing this after the funding runs out, but so much more could have been done."

[40] Burtonshaw, S. and Simons, J. (2023). Future of Tutoring. Public First. Accessed: https://impetus-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/publications/The-Future-of-Tutoring.pdf

[41] K. Latham. (2024). Too early to call time on the NTP. Sutton Trust. Accessed: https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/too-early-to-call-time-on-the-ntp/

[42] Lynch, S., Bradley, E., Aston, K., Schwendel, G., and Lord, P. (2024). National Tutoring Programme – Evaluation and Reflections. NFER. Accessed: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e2c1f46cc3c902a6e6fbed/National_Tutoring_Programme_-_evaluation_and_reflection.pdf

[43] Ibid,.

[44] Ibid,. p. 11.

CONCLUSIONS

This report makes clear the circumstances in which NTP and 16-19TF came into being, rolled out at pace, and delivered over 6 million tutoring sessions across England during the four years they were in operation. It draws a number of conclusions – some positive, many not – around how the schemes were developed and what flowed directly from both policy design and implementation.

Many of these lessons are germane across other government policies. The unique context of Covid recovery adds an additional layer of complexity, but also speaks to an even greater need to record how such policy was made in such a challenging context.

The next section of this report turns to these lessons, and how to learn from them in order to set a proposal for a new vision of state-funded tutoring in schools and colleges.

PART 2: DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR A FUTURE NATIONAL STATE-FUNDED TUTORING SCHEME

WHAT SHOULD A NEW STATE-FUNDED TUTORING PROGRAMME LOOK LIKE?

In the first section of this report, we outlined the circumstances that led to the creation and delivery of NTP and 16-19TF, the successes and setbacks that the scheme and its architects encountered along the way, and the lessons that can be learned from the design and implementation of the two programmes. In this second section, we set out how these learnings could be applied to the design of a future state-funded tutoring programme, and the trade-offs that would need to be negotiated as part of this process.

What follows incorporates the insights from the first section of the report, the inputs of tutoring providers and other sector experts, and the opinions of parents, teachers and senior leaders as established in a series of focus groups. On the basis of these inputs, we have created a blueprint for what future iterations of a state-funded tutoring programme could look like.

METHODOLOGY

In order to progress from the conclusions of the first section of this report to a comprehensive blueprint for state-funded tutoring, this phase of our research proceeded in two stages.

Stakeholder workshop

The first stage of this phase was a stakeholder workshop. In this workshop, we outlined and refined a proposed set of major variables that a future state-funded tutoring scheme would need to consider. Following the workshop, we propose that these would be the main elements of design of any future programme:

- The purpose and vision of a notional tutoring programme
- The curriculum and how it would be quality assured
- The cost and dosage of the programme
- The delivery mechanism employed
- The accountability mechanisms and funding streams for such a programme

The different options available within each variable category are shown in table 1.

As well as discussing the different variables at work in a future state-funded tutoring programme, the workshop set out a series of hypotheses of how these different variables might combine in different configurations to form coherent offers, all optimising for a different quality. This represented our first attempt to draw out coherent blueprints for what a future tutoring offer might look like. The different options are shown in Table 2. It should be emphasised that these are not the only ways of designing a scheme - indeed, the variables can combine in a very large number of ways - but these have been constructed as illustrative and internally consistent ways of exemplifying options for a future scheme.

Purpose and vision	Curriculum and quality assurance	Cost and dosage	Delivery mechanism	Funding and accountability
Targeted or universal	Curriculum set by providers, governments, or schools/colleges	Fixed dosage (in hours or cost per hour) or assumed costs with some flexibility	In person or online	Ringfenced or mainstream funding
Age-specific or throughout 5-19	English and maths, or any subject	Regional ‘contracting lots’ with a commercial contract	Within education settings or in community settings	Existing funding mechanism (such as Pupil Premium) or dedicated mechanism
Catch-up, stretch and challenge, or enrichment	Government quality assurance process or set curriculum	Total delivery flexibility	Delivered by existing school staff or external staff	Vouchers for pupils/ families to ‘spend’ or direct to settings
			AI-led or human-led	Accountability via outputs, specific data, or high-level statement

Table 1: different variables for a future state funded tutoring programme

Option 1 - NTP v2	*Option 2 - A new national scheme*	*Option 3 - PP-driven setting support*	*Option 4 - Civil society tutoring*	*Option 5 - High-tech tutoring*
Optimising for <u>rollout speed</u>	Optimising for <u>delivery quality</u>	Optimising for <u>uptake</u>	Optimising for <u>delivery flexibility</u>	Optimising for <u>cost</u>
Ringfenced additional money allocated to all schools and colleges.	Centrally approved providers only (no school provision).	Schools given additional funding directly.	Voucher for a sum of money (either provided universally or for agreed groups)	Centrally approved providers.
Indication from government as to target population.	Universal coverage through DfE market-making.	Colleges given an equivalent sum (as per 16-19TF).	Voucher follows the pupil rather than school or college - young person is the commissioner.	Possibility of a DfE delivery mechanism (e.g. Oak National Academy).
Schools and colleges act as commissioners.	Commissioned by schools and colleges.	Government directs target population but this is not mandated.	Can purchase through school/college, or independent organisation.	Commissioned by schools and colleges.
Total flexibility within allocated pot, with no clawbacks.	Strict quality bar through either mandatory or advisory kitemark for funding.	Reported through Pupil Premium but no specific additional reporting.	Could be tutoring as an enrichment model (e.g. music lessons, football clubs, or academic provision).	Cost is lower, therefore universal offer is possible - pupils who are falling behind, stretch, enrichment, minority subjects, transition.
Light-touch accountability statements (as per 16-19TF).	16-19 works in the same way as pre-16.		Access to approved providers; young people restricted what they can buy.	
Curriculum up to provider discretion.	Curriculum either set by the government or highly quality assured, and accountable through kitemark.			

Table 2: different options for a state-funded tutoring programme

Having outlined these variables and constructed five dummy options for a new scheme in our expert stakeholder workshop, we then tested how parents, teachers and members of senior leadership in schools and colleges viewed the different possibilities in a series of focus groups.

Message testing

The specifications for the focus groups were as follows:

Parent groups:

- All participants had children who were attending a mainstream primary or secondary school or college in the maintained sector.
- There was a mixture of genders.
- There was ethnic diversity within each group.
- One group was recruited from the East Midlands and one group was recruited from the North East.
- Some participants had experience of tutoring for their children and some did not.
- One group were parents from wealthier socioeconomic grades (ABC1) and the other had parents from poorer socioeconomic grades (C2DE).[45]

Teacher groups:

- All participants had at least three years' experience of teaching Maths or English in mainstream primary or secondary schools or colleges in the maintained sector.
- There was a mixture of genders.
- There was ethnic diversity within each group.
- One group was recruited from the North West and one group was recruited from South West.
- Most had experience of tutoring in their settings.
- One group consisted of classroom teachers and one group consisted of middle and senior leaders (heads of department and above)

In the focus groups, we gauged both feelings towards tutoring as a concept and the choices participants would make between different options (such as 'would you rather tutoring was delivered in person or online?').

The findings from this qualitative work are laid out in the next section.

FINDINGS

1. Enthusiasm for tutoring was strong among parents, but it was not seen as a priority by those working in schools.

Among parents, tutoring was thought of very positively. It was seen primarily as a means of helping children to catch up, rather than as a way of stretching high-flying learners. In both parent groups, around half of the participants had sought out private tutoring for their children, with most of these cases involving catch-up support for secondary school pupils. While there was a suggestion from one parent that tutoring should be superfluous in a well-functioning state education system, there was widespread acknowledgement that tutoring is a positive option for children given the imperfections that exist within the system. Despite this enthusiasm, very few (if any) had heard of NTP or 16-19TF as dedicated programmes, even if some were aware of their children's schools offering various forms of 'catch-up sessions', and overall sentiment towards tutoring programmes was cautiously positive.

"It was a confidence issue, where she was sitting in maths and was afraid to put her hand up and things like that, so she just used to sit there quietly. So we got a tutor in, who brought her on, and we did it for a number of years before GCSEs, and it really worked, it really helped."
– Father of secondary school-aged children, North East

"My daughter's school did something similar [to tutoring]. As the exams approached, they had the STEM subjects. Those classes were being done after school, which my daughter attended as well. And I think they also played a really important role."
– Father of sixth form-aged children, East Midlands

"I like the idea. I mean, it sounds valuable…it sounds good, I just don't know how it would be organised"
– Father of primary and secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

"I think it's a good thing, it just possibly depends on how they deliver it, and who they want to target it at for what reasons, and who it would be available for. That would probably be my biggest thing."
– Mother of primary school-aged children, North East

Among teachers, the mood was very different. Neither classroom teachers nor the middle and senior leaders group saw tutoring as a priority, with attendance, behaviour, wellbeing, recruitment and SEND support seen as much more urgent priorities for teachers than attainment catch-up. As well as this, there was scepticism regarding its efficacy, particularly in the absence of parental engagement. Again, the working assumption was that tutoring was primarily there to support those children who had fallen behind. That said, our expert stakeholder group shared broader insights about positive attitudes from - and strong delivery relationships with - many schools when tutoring is taking place, with in some cases the appetite for onsite or externally provided tutoring increasing post-NTP.

"I think the government have got much bigger issues to think about than tutoring. I think they need to think about the recruitment crisis going on in schools at the moment."
– Female secondary English teacher, Bristol

"If the kids engaged, then yeah, we've seen that impact, but the children weren't engaged. They needed that one-to-one provision, rather than a group."
– Male primary school teacher, Bristol

"I think if you asked people in school 'do you want the funding to go to tutoring or would you want the funding to go towards support for [SEND] children, you'd want the support, because it's almost impossible to run a class with significant needs without help."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

"In terms of pupil attainment [since Covid], I don't think it's massively affected us. However, I do feel there has been a huge increase in mental health issues since Covid"
– Female head of department, secondary school, Manchester

"The constant low-level disruption, really, that's sort of the biggest challenge we're facing"
– Female head of department, secondary school, Manchester

2. Among both parents and teachers, tutoring is framed in terms of academic catch-up for pupils falling behind, rather than a means of providing universal uplift, accessing enrichment or providing stretch activities.

As part of our focus groups, we asked parents and teachers a number of questions about what they thought tutoring should be used for. Both in terms of the eligibility of pupils and the content they should cover, there was a consensus that a tutoring programme would be most effective if it functioned as a means of helping pupils with low attainment catch up, rather than as a universal offer or an offer specifically targeted at disadvantaged young people.

"Deprived children are not necessarily falling behind because of their background. I just think that if the child's falling behind, regardless [of background], if they need that extra support, I'd give them it"
– Father of secondary school-aged children, North East

"In an ideal world, it should be offered to everybody, but if we've got restricted budgets and we're saying 'look, the government have got this amount of money and it can't be for everyone', then I actually think it should go to the people who are perhaps really struggling'
– Father of primary and secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

Among teachers there was more focus on falling behind being framed around income as well as academic. Wider evidence and experience from our expert stakeholder group underlines the strong inter-relationship between low attainment and disadvantage in any case.

"I think you do need to target those less able, those underachievers, yeah."
– Male primary school teacher, Bristol

"In an ideal world, it would be everyone, but we don't live in one of those, so I think that the targeted approach would be the way forward."
– Male sixth form English teacher, Bristol

"The focus in my school is always on students who have poor attention, who are low ability, students who are, you know, off target and all that sort of stuff."
– Female head of department, secondary school, Manchester

"I feel that [PP-eligible pupils] have already been targeted, so I don't know why there would be a further need to double up on that."
– Female assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

"With all the will in the world, it's not going to go to the children that are working at or a little bit above [their level], because the pressures are to get or to raise the standards"
– Male assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

Although one or two primary school teachers expressed some concern regarding the risk of misreporting attainment levels in order to access tutoring funding, the overall consensus was that the finite resources of any future tutoring programme would be best spent on helping those with low relative attainment levels catch up.

This instinctive use of tutoring to target those struggling to hit academic attainment goals had knock-on effects for other variables and options. For example, a voucher-style system for use with a variety of enrichment options (such as sports coaching or music lessons) was ruled out. More implicitly, there was a sense from teachers in particular that tutoring as a concept pertains to academic outcomes, and thus that what passes for tutoring with the very youngest learners is closer to high-ratio welfare check ins.

"I was in Reception and Year One [during the pandemic]. By the afternoon, we would group them off with another member of staff, and we would spend the afternoons arranging Zoom calls with those most vulnerable at home. So we'd identify the ones that we were a bit more worried about, the ones that we knew needed to catch up with a bit for welfare. Yeah, we kind of wanted to check on their welfare, and we did it through the disguise of tutoring sometimes."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

3. Parents were more open to the possibility of specialist tutors leading tutoring sessions than teachers themselves.

With tutoring framed by parents and teachers alike as an academic catch-up strategy, there was a shared belief that schools should act as commissioners of tutoring. From teachers' and leaders' perspectives in particular, the ideal model for tutoring involves teachers having as much control as possible over the curriculum, targeting, dosage and (in particular) delivery. For most teachers and leaders, this preference for teachers as deliverers of tutoring was a reflection of the strength of relationships that classroom teachers have with their classes.

"As teachers, we know our children's strengths. We know those areas of need, we've identified those. If money's coming into a school, as a teacher, you want to be able to direct it to those children who really need that. So it's fine for it to be happening after school, but almost useless for them to be going to a retired teacher who's just going to be doing whatever they want to with them."
– Male primary school teacher, Bristol

"It'd be great if it were onsite with a classroom teacher"
– Female secondary school English teacher, Bristol

"I think the advantage of having the classroom teachers deliver the tutor in is that they've got that relationship with the students, regardless whether it's primary or secondary. And obviously I'm a secondary school teacher, but it can take a long time to build up a relationship with a student and gain that trust. You know, if someone was external to come in, it might not be effective for that reason."
– Female head of department, secondary school, Manchester

Parents shared this sentiment in some quarters, but several were open to the possibility of high-quality tutors supplementing teachers. Among parents with primary school-aged children, this was a reflection of the specialisation of tutors vis-a-vis classroom teachers. As well as this, there was a sense from some parents that children sometimes fall behind because the relationship with their teacher is not as good as it should be, and working with external staff could be a welcome change.

"I would prefer it to be by my child's teacher, because I think they know the teacher already, and while it's better for them to learn from external people sometimes, it's hard for children to actually communicate with them."
– Mother of primary school-aged children, East Midlands

"The teacher covers all subjects a lot of the time if it's in primary school, so if they need some maths tutoring, maybe it is better for it to be an external, just solely a maths tutor."
– Mother of secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

"I would like her teacher to do it, but would she listen to her? Because she's been there all the time, I would pick somebody that she doesn't know, because I think she would have a bit more respect and think, 'Oh God, I have to listen'"
– Mother of middle school-aged children, North East

Our expert stakeholder group also reported the value of non-teachers as tutors in a range of delivery models, with a positive impact on progress outcomes for pupils and in some cases, as aspirational peer role models when tutors came from the same background as the pupils they teach (e.g. ethnicity or low-income background).

4. But teachers had concerns about the trade-off between workload and purposeful delivery.

Teachers were torn on whether ceding delivery of tutoring to specialist tutors was worth it for the mitigation of additional workload on classroom teachers. As one sixth-form teacher put it:

"The teacher is the right person, but as we've mentioned, we've got a workload crisis. We've got all the other bits and pieces going on, and you're trying to ask the teacher to come and then work or do extra hours, and it makes it really difficult."
– Male English teacher, sixth form, Bristol

This dilemma was echoed by school middle and senior leaders, who also alluded to the idea that external provision may end up as a false economy in some cases (such as with small schools) because of the bureaucratic challenges involved.

"It can take a long time to build up a relationship with a student and gain that trust. if someone was external to come in, it might not be effective for that reason. But then, obviously, if you've got a specialist tutor, it does relieve that pressure from the teachers."
– Female head of department, secondary school, Manchester

"Being a small primary school, we have issues such as, we only pay the caretaker certain hours to open the building on the weekdays, for example, and then we would incur building costs in another way. If an external body was to use the building, there'd be insurance implications, a whole load of mess, basically."
– Female assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

There also wasn't a consensus on whether teachers would be willing to work paid overtime out of directed time in order to provide optimal tutoring arrangements.

"We know our subjects. We know where the gaps are, and what they need to do. But I 100% know none of my friends would come and work on a Saturday as a tutor, because we have got our own families, where we've got busy lives, and we're taking [our children] to clubs, left, right and center. And the last thing I want to do is go and work on my days off."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

"Obviously it depends on the teacher, but yeah, if it was on the Saturday and someone came to me and said 'Look, I'll pay you for your time - fancy taking on an intervention group with the children that you know?', then yeah, maybe."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

One possibility floated was the option of tutoring being provided by trained teaching assistants or cover teachers. This would enable some degree of continuity in the relationship between school staff and learners receiving tutoring without adding to the workload of teachers, provided that they were appropriately quality assured.

"We've gone back to using teaching assistants. The main body of the lesson is taught and delivered by the teacher, and then the teaching assistant has that little little group that they then go to a quieter space to kind of go over things, perhaps at a different speed."
– Female assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

"Some of the TAs are brilliant, you know, they could step up and do it. Or PPA teachers, cover teachers, the kind of people that, you know, would want the overtime and the extra work, and are great at doing the job."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

5. Teachers did not want their pupils taken out of lessons for tutoring, but parents saw some advantages.

There was a strong feeling from teachers that tutoring taking place in lessons should be avoided if at all possible. Such a step was seen as detrimental to all parties: teachers did not want to be taken away from their classes (or to lose their PPA allocations), or to lose time where students were in front of them. Saturdays or slots before and/or after school were seen as preferable.

"I think I wouldn't want them to miss my lesson to go and get tutored in the same subject. So I would want it to be either in a different lesson that's not going to impact me, or after school."
– Female secondary English teacher, Bristol

"As a head of department, you need to understand that I don't want to lose lesson time to students because we've got restraints around curriculum time."
– Male head of department, sixth form, Manchester

"As a primary school leader, you've kind of got to offer children a broad and balanced curriculum. You have to do that, - it is part of the contract, basically. And so it is tricky taking children out of lessons: you've got to balance that with it not being the same lesson all the time, and who you're taking out."
– Male assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

"I agree that it's really difficult to take them out of school time as well, because if you take them out of something, then for one, we're teaching in that time, but also, they're missing something else. When we've done interventions in the past, we've done them before school, so they come into school a little bit earlier, so it's not horrendous for the parents, but the children are a little bit more fresh."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

Parents were slightly more receptive to the idea of taking pupils out of lessons to provide tutoring, partly because of concerns about stress, wellbeing and social life emanating from loss of free time around the school day.

"I would prefer them to take my daughter out of the subject that she's struggling in to then focus on that subject as a one-to-one… I don't want her to feel singled out."
– Father of primary school-aged children, East Midlands

"I wouldn't really want my child missing out on break times and lunch times, which I think are needed in school, to be getting extra tuition. So I think it would need to be within a lesson."
– Mother of primary and middle school-aged children, North East

Both teachers and parents were willing to accept that it might occasionally be necessary to take children close to public exams out of optional subjects to give them tutoring in core subjects. Those working in schools pointed out that this is already deemed an inconvenient necessity in many settings.

"It was approaching exam time, so [taking pupils out of lessons for tuition] worked. In my opinion, it motivated them, it focused their minds. The fact that it was only introduced as the exams were approaching - I take the point that as the kids get older, they make that decision themselves. They'll ditch the stuff they're not interested in, and they'll put all their resources into what they know they need, and what they would like to succeed in."
– Father of primary and secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

"There was this sort of perceived idea that 'my child needs support in English, maths or science', and it wasn't universal across all key stage four subjects: the ones that were outside core had to be supported by departments like, say, for example, history and geography. But certainly, I remember some of the students feeling very resentful about it."
– Male head of department, secondary school, Manchester

6. There was an expectation that a future tutoring programme's curriculum would focus around English and maths primarily.

Given the likely limitations to funding of any putative tutoring scheme, there was a consensus that maths and English should be prioritised for tutoring. This was shared by both parents and teachers.

"If resources are finite, then you've got to choose subjects which are going to deliver adults who pay taxes, and I'm being brutal here - you know, subjects that are essential. So I'd probably say maths and English."
– Father of sixth form-aged children, East Midlands

"[They need] face-to-face tutoring with the more critical subjects, such as maths and English"
– Father of primary school-aged children, East Midlands

"Automatically, maths and English spring to mind…they're the core subjects that you absolutely have to have when moving forward."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

There was widespread warmth among parents in particular for the idea of a wide-ranging remit for tutoring, but there was also an acceptance that this would be unlikely given the constraints on government spending. As one parent put it:

"I just can't see it happening…but it sounds mint. I would love my kids to think, - not that they would - but that piano lessons would be an option that they could do if they want to, that it's not something rich or wealthy people do."
– Father of secondary school-aged children, North East

7. Online and tech-enabled tutoring was seen as a cost-saving supplement to in-person tutoring, rather than as a substitute for it.

Among both parents and school staff, there was a marked preference for in-person tutoring, mostly on the basis that it would be easier to guarantee engagement and effective teaching.

"With tutoring in person, I think you can see them face to face, and see the signs if they're not engaged, and you can engage them. It's normally better in person than online."
– Female primary school teacher, Bristol

"We have a lot of families that wouldn't have computers and the type of things to be able to do it online at home. They just have a very small mobile phone that perhaps belongs to the parent."
– Female head of department, primary school, Manchester

"I think it needs to be somebody sat down with them, otherwise it'll just never happen."
– Mother of primary and middle school-aged children, North East

"I think with this staring at a screen, the kids aren't going to learn as well."
– Mother of primary school-aged children, North East

"[My son] used to go in person, and then the day changed to fall in line with his after-school tuition, and so he now does it online. And half the time, there's YouTube on the screen behind, and I have to keep going in and saying, 'I'm paying for this - turn that off!', whereas you can't do that in a classroom environment."
– Mother of secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

With this in mind, there was limited receptiveness to the idea of tech- and AI-enabled tutoring, with its role limited to assessment for the most part. For some parents, the scepticism centred around reliability; for others, it was about engagement.

"I'm not against AI, absolutely not. It helps me immensely at work and whatever. But I think there are certain dimensions to AI in which I think we overrate it. I think it's not as effective as we'd like it to be."
– Father of sixth form-aged children, East Midlands

"My son's had the option to have AI-based tutoring, and won't do it, just has got no sort of inclination to do that whatsoever. But if he was sat there with a tutor, he would do it. So, I think there's certain children obviously that would benefit from that, but there's a lot that wouldn't as well, and they need the motivation from an actual tutor."
– Mother of primary and secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

"You don't want to rely too much on technology, because, obviously it's not always guaranteed that it works, or having access to it, and things like that."
– Mother of primary school-aged children, North East

There were, however, some who supported the idea of tech-enabled assessment platforms (such as Sparx Maths) in some limited contexts as a way of freeing up teacher time and cutting costs. It was also easier to see such platforms working with older children.

"For the AI, I think it should be more kind of almost testing their understanding…at the end of a session or something, you know, answer these questions on an app. I can see that working, because it kind of does work in the current situation, doesn't it?"
– Father of primary and secondary school-aged children, East Midlands

"When she comes home, she's got a Sparx website, and then she does a game, so it's a maths game. So she enjoys that."
– Mother of middle school-aged children, North East

"I can see it being useful, perhaps for number skills, phonics skills, you know, it's either right or wrong, but not for discretion subjects, really."
– Female assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

"The human interaction is really important, but the older students really do work well on a device, so like Seneca, Tassomai, and especially for subjects like maths, where there's instant results."
– Female English teacher, secondary school, Bristol

"I think it certainly could be used alongside. I don't think it would replace that face to face, but I think there's room for it…if it can be done in a blended form, to save some money, which means that, you know, more tutoring can be done to to all the students, as opposed to just those targeted then, then, yeah, potentially, it's a great idea."
– Male English teacher, secondary school, Bristol

8.Teachers and leaders saw dedicated funding as a prerequisite for a successful tutoring programme, but were wary of stringent accountability mechanisms.

Our focus groups with teachers and leaders began with widespread allusions to challenging budget shortfalls, and a long list of issues they deemed more worth funding than tutoring.

"There's bigger things they need to be focusing on. I fundamentally disagree with it."
– Female English teacher, secondary school, Bristol

"It would have to be an additional pot of funding, and then also, if it was to be national, how much funding? Quite often, there's funding that comes through, but it's such a small amount that you're never going to get an impact for any decent number of students. So I think again, there are absolutely other areas that need to be addressed before tutoring."
– Male English teacher, sixth form, Bristol

"Our school is crumbling. The maintenance budget that I know that our estates team have is so low."
– Female head of department, secondary school, Manchester

With this in mind, there was an acknowledgement that funding for tutoring would need to be ring fenced, but that this would cause its own problems. There was also an awareness that any funding entitlement carries with it a risk of gaming the system.

"I know primary was about 80 pounds per child at the time, but within my school, we organized it so that the part time teachers did tutoring in their non-teaching days, so to speak, because the kind of bridge between the children not being known by somebody and being able to make progress was just too great with a stranger coming into the mix. You know, we needed, you know, a really tight dovetail on it."
– Female assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

"If it's ring fenced, I'm imagining that there's going to be some sort of data point that you've got to qualify those students for. So I'm just trying to think how that might be accountable."
– Female assistant headteacher, primary school, Manchester

"What you don't want is for schools to start dropping their attainment predictions to access more tutoring funding."
– Female English teacher, secondary school, Bristol

What this means for a state funded tutoring programme in the future – essential elements and areas for further discussion

Based on the data collected across this research, we can conclude that there are number of factors which we consider essential to a new national tutoring system. While government and policymakers are not of course bound by these, we urge them to consider these recommendations as the best pre-conditions of success

Alongside that, there are a smaller number of areas where we believe there is less consensus or less strong evidence, and where it would be reasonable for government or other policymakers to take a differing view or leave the option open for localised and customised delivery.

Finally, all of this represents the best view as of early 2025. It is possible - even likely - that further evidence will emerge in coming months and years, and the circumstances of schools and colleges, and technology, will also change. All of that would be an important context for the time period in which policymakers were considering a future scheme.

ESSENTIALS

E1. Tutoring should exist in all Key Stages, including post-16.

There is little to suggest that tutoring is differentially effective between primary and secondary age students, or those in post-16 settings. Depending on the target group(s) chosen, of which more below, we think it clear that any tutoring should be open to young people across key stages, including post 16. We discuss Key Stage 1 and early years further below.

E2. Tutoring should exist as a mixed model: both school and college-delivered and externally-provided tutoring should be used according to local needs and demand. There should be a form of quality assurance for external provision.

The first half of this report discussed extensively the switch from purely externally driven tutoring to a school based scheme within NTP; the 16-19TF always operated the mixed model. It seems clear both from the evidence of NTP evaluations from NfER, and the positive way in which school based tutoring was received, as well as the responses in the focus groups, that this mixed model would be the way to continue a future scheme. National providers would benefit from some form of quality assurance, as would schools and colleges in deciding who to contract with.
There are different ways to design such a scheme, and we think NTP Year 1 and a small number of approved national providers is now overly prescriptive, but it is clear that in a less mature market, there needs to be some form of quality assurance.

E3. There should be light-touch accountability for tutoring, and no match funding.

The most significant negative feedback both in the recent focus groups, and in the evaluations of NTP in particular, came from the match funding requirements from schools, and associated reporting back of numbers. While it is clear that any government in future will require evidence of demonstrated use and need of tutoring funding, we think it is possible to utilise a scheme similar to that of 16-19TF, or the wider Pupil Premium, which asks for reporting back on use of spend against criteria (and numbers treated by the intervention). Schools and colleges would of course remain entitled to use additional funding on top for additional tutoring - and we recognise that a requirement for match funding did at the margins generate additional resources for tutoring - but on balance, it seems clear that the negative effects associated with this, including reputational damage from underspends and poor school relationships, means that such additional funding was an insufficient prize.

E4. The default format should be 1:1 or small-group, in-person tutoring.

It is clear from evaluations of tutoring both in principle and in the way in which NTP and 16-19TF operated that 1:1 in person or small group is the most effective way of delivering tutoring (though some of our expert stakeholder group have evidence that online and in-person hubs achieve equally positive progress outcomes, and for some communities, online provision may be preferable and more accessible for a range of reasons).[46] Maintaining a strict 1:1 ratio would unduly constrain resources and minimise the number of students who could benefit from it; increasing a group size beyond five or six would seem to lessen effectiveness of tutoring sessions. While there is a case for online tuition - and we discuss technology more below - we think the default of in person setting is correct. This can happen at different times of the day and week and in different spaces though, which is discussed more below.

E5. Government needs to decide whether tutoring is a standards raising intervention or an intervention targeting the attainment gap, and design and communicate accordingly.

Most importantly, the purpose of the scheme will determine who is in scope. If tutoring is about additional support for those falling behind, then it should be targeted at those groups, and not using socioeconomic status as a proxy. If it is an intervention targeting the attainment gap, then it should be aimed at those on lower incomes exclusively. The former does mean that state funded tutoring could be available for wealthy families whose children are struggling; or that poorer families whose children are performing well would not be entitled to support. The latter does mean that those not in the most acute need would not be entitled to support even if their students are behind. Our interviewees and experts were split. Parent polling and focus group work conducted for this project and former work carried out by Public First on tutoring shows very strongly a view that funding for academic catch up should be targeted based on academic need, not socioeconomic need (though there may well be significant overlap in some cases).[47]
Set against that, teachers and external providers felt equally strongly that it ought to be a social mission – and indeed that the charitable purpose of many tutoring organisations was to provide support to those who could not access it privately. We can see a case for both sides of this.
What is most important – and where NTP in particularly suffered – is not being clear.
Having a target, then removing it, and theoretically offering flexibility but with a bias towards socio economic status, simply breeds confusion. A future scheme needs to be clear on its purpose and design and communicate accordingly.

E6. Tutoring should be offered in English and maths only.

We discussed extensively in the focus groups how wide tutoring should go. Parents and teachers are instinctively attracted to a model which could cover wider academic subjects; and some are also interested in a wider conception of education and engagement and enrichment which allowed for state funded support for broader experiences - such as tutoring being allowed for art, music, drama, or positive activities for young people. In principle, it is hard to argue against this broad definition. Our reason for recommending against this relates purely to most effective use of any future tutoring pot - and a focus on English and maths only is likely to see a greater number of students receive additional support (and in sufficient dose that the evidence suggests it would make a difference), rather than spreading funding thinner to cover a wider range of activities and young people.

E7. Dosage should be at least 12 hours and should be funded accordingly.

In previous work on "The Future of Tutoring", Public First summarised research from existing tutoring programmes from around the world, and the experience of providers delivering NTP and 16-19TF, to conclude that a minimum dosage of 12 hours per programme (i.e. one course of provision in English, or maths) was necessary to reliably deliver benefits.[48] Although there will be temptation among policymakers to shorten dosage, or to widen group size, in order to maximise overall numbers accessing tuition, we think the evidence is clear that for efficacy reasons, a 12 hour minimum should be maintained. Funding for such a scheme should also be designed appropriately – again, there will be temptations among policymakers to value engineer this down but for quality reasons, better value for money is likely to be secured with an agreed hourly rate both for mainstream pupils (and for post 16), and for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

E8. Schools and colleges should act as commissioners, with the DfE acting as market makers.

Of the different delivery models we considered, there was strong universal agreement among experts and teachers and parents that a commissioning model from the school or college is the best way of combining national standards with flexibility. It sits consistently with a model that allows for schools and colleges to apply some discretion on user base and funding, with national constraints on student eligibility and subject choice. In other words, we do not think a scheme similarly to that of NTP Year 1 is the right way to go, with nationally commissioned provision. However, we do think that the fundamental insight of NTP and 16-19TF, which was the need to market make an immature system, would still apply at least initially in any future state funded scheme. Therefore we think it important that there be some form of national architecture rebuilt for any future scheme which helps ensure supply for schools and colleges (and which could, as discussed above, come from school or college staff as well as external third parties).

AREAS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

D1. Dedicated and ringfenced funding would be beneficial, but potentially curb flexibility; 16-19 needs further consideration of some form of premium funding in any case.

NTP and 16-19TF operated via ringfenced funds, in slightly different ways, as discussed in the first half of the report. There has been consistent feedback, including in our focus groups, for greater flexibility of funding to allow schools and colleges to use the funding in a way most appropriate for them. While set against that is the need to demonstrate value for money to taxpayers of any future scheme, and maximise take up (and not have funding via increased Pupil Premium or any 16-19 Premium used for non-tutoring purposes). We think there is insufficient evidence either way to make a definitive judgement on this point at this stage - on balance, we probably feel that accountability and a strong push from any future government as to the efficacy of tutoring may mean that non-ringfenced funding is possible, but we recognise policymakers in future may want to go a different way.

Specifically on 16-19, it is clear that whether through a ringfenced fund or use of existing 'premium' funding, colleges are hampered by the absence of a 16-19 premium equivalent in scope and purpose to Pupil Premium. A fuller exploration of 16-19 tuition would be incomplete without wider consideration of premium funding for that group, which would make tuition more available to disadvantaged learners who are much more likely to have low prior attainment post 16.

D2. Tutoring can take place at different times and in different settings.

Parents and teachers took different views in our focus groups as to when the best time for tutoring would be, with teachers broadly speaking being more in favour of "end of day" tutoring as opposed to students leaving lessons, and parents more in favour of tutoring taking place during timetabled lessons. We have heard and seen of good practice taking place in a myriad of different ways, and it seems premature to make a final and nationally determined view on this topic. Additionally, we can see a case for tutoring happening at weekends, in holidays, or outside of schools in approved third party settings (for example, in supplementary schooling, or in a community provider that works closely with families and schools). All of these could work well, and we feel that the most important thing is outcomes, rather than being prescriptive on where tutoring takes place.

D3. Offering school and college based staff who aren't teachers the opportunity to upskill themselves through tutoring qualifications could act as a balance between school-based and external tutoring.

Some of the nervousness around school and college based tutoring came through in our expert interviews from a concern around quality - and settings simply giving staff (TAs, often) additional funding to deliver tutoring with insufficient planning and co-ordination. If some form of setting based tutoring is necessary and beneficial, and we think it is, then we think that there is a case for some form of nationally designed tutoring qualification (an NPQ or equivalent) to help upskill what could become a significant proportion of the education workforce. This workforce could also more broadly include undergraduate students and trainee teachers.

D4. There should be a positive exploration of AI-enabled tutoring for appropriate phases and subjects (most likely to be older children, primarily in Maths).

Teachers and parents all recognised the ubiquity of ed tech in schools and also for home based learning, and mostly expressed confidence in their children and students' ability to use it (especially parents for programmes that had been recommended by schools). The specific framing of AI caused some concern among professionals and parents, but in discussion, most could see a case for a combination of AI being used for diagnostic and feedback, as well as human interaction. We are very conscious that given the pace at which this is moving, it is hard to say in early 2025 what may be possible in even six months' time. At present, we simply therefore say that there seems a good in principle case for the positive benefits which AI could make for tutoring, and government and external partners should be positive about exploring AI as part of wider ed tech products used for tutoring and interventions, where - again, at present - the evidence seems strongest with older children, and in mathematics.

D5. More work needs to be done on what an appropriate tutoring offer looks like in early years and Key Stage 1.

Among parents and teachers, there was concern about what tutoring, or interventions generally, looked like for younger children. While we think there is clearly a case - well founded and long established - for early intervention to address academic and social barriers to learning, in school and outside, it is not clear whether this ought to be formally associated with a national tutoring scheme or possibly a differently designed scheme.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS FOR A NEW SCHEME

This report has identified a number of themes for a new tutoring programme at some point in the future, across schools and colleges. It draws from expert evidence, popular opinion, design from policy experts, and extensive findings from the two predecessor schemes.

For policy to be successful, it needs a combination of things – which NTP and 16-19TF showed. But above everything else, perhaps, it needs to recognise what has come before and what worked and didn't work – and adapt to context, of course, but based on prior knowledge. The hope of this two part report is that it has both synthesised what happened before, and set the design principles for any future government or policymaker who wants – we hope – to one day look at state funded tutoring again.

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