

A guide to Private Tuition

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Abstract

The following is a brief guide to the ins and outs of private tuition: its relationship with formal classroom education, how to build an effective tutor/pupil relationship, practicalities associated with hiring tutors and specialist considerations for those seeking lessons in music, languages and beyond.

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History and Development

The one-to-one teacher-pupil relationship is as old as humanity itself. Some of the most celebrated academic relationships throughout the ages have been based on this model: Socrates who taught Plato, who in turn tutored Aristotle; Verrocchio who tutored Da Vinci; and Sigmund Freud who mentored Carl Jung and Sabina Spielrein. In formal education it constitutes a critical part of the contemporary university system, with undergraduates being mentored by lecturers and professors, or sometimes post-graduate students as well.

In the long eras before formalised education, the wealthy members of society would have paid tutors to educate their children, especially when they were young. In this context the roles of childminder and tutor often overlapped: the quintessential eighteenth and nineteenth century female governess acted as both a surrogate mother figure and an educator to her charges. Education in those days had a different bent compared to now: a tutor was just as likely to teach a child deportment as they were to teach geometry.

With the advent of Victorian social change and the formalisation of the education system, the state of play shifted. The growing middle class would hire tutors to teach their children subjects not covered in school, the most notable of which were probably Latin and Ancient Greek. In this way families disenfranchised from the elitist public school system could provide their young with a “classical” education at home.

In the post-war wind of change, when Britain and the world was building itself anew, private tutoring took on a new, more commercialised role, with nascent tuition agencies helping connect tutors to tutees nationwide. The coming of the World Wide Web fast-tracked this relationship, giving individuals seeking tuition and broader and more

varied range of choice not possible in times past.

The diversifying of academic subjects, the growing commoditisation of the world's educational systems and the opening up of international linguistic borders facilitated by air travel has also increased the demand for private tuition.

Private tuition vs. Classroom environments

The critical difference between private tuition and classroom teaching lies in the percentage of the teacher's attention the pupil receives. In a classroom environment this can be worryingly low: while the overall educational content is useful for the pupil, specific questions and misunderstandings can often go ignored. All it takes is one vocal pupil, or a vocal minority, to distract the teacher's attention, and the rest of the class suffer.

By contrast, in a private tuition environment, the pupil's needs, weaknesses and queries are focussed on fully. *This* is private tuition's prime advantage: an intensity of educational interaction no other platform can match.

In Britain, there is a general perception among school teachers that private tuition is the 'poor cousin' of formalised classroom learning, reflected by the use of the term 'shadow education'; this view is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that some may see it as a recourse only available to a privileged few, due to cost considerations. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth: private tuition clients come from a diverse cross-section of British society, all of them wishing to better their children's prospects.

In fact, one could even go so far as to claim private tuition helps plug the gaps where public education is lacking.

In an EU report (amusingly entitled '*The Challenge of Shadow Education*'), the following relevant points are made about the relationship between private and public education:

- Tutoring exists primarily because elements within the public education system are incomplete, non-existent or ineffective.
- The dynamic of exam-based learning is conducive to the prevalence of tuition.
- Much tutoring is done by existing teachers, as a way to gain supplementary incomes. This trend was particularly notable in Eastern Europe during the 90s.

(NB: from our own data, we can confirm that UK private tutors come from a range of backgrounds, including recent graduates, university staff, school teachers and professionals.)

...so we can see the worlds of Private Tuition and Public Education are in fact very interlinked and symbiotic, in the way that the character of the former is informed by the policies of the latter.

It is also pertinent to remember that private tuition fulfils educational needs that could be never addressed in the classroom, such as teaching niche languages and other subjects on the periphery of academia. Another key part of private tutoring is providing one-on-one music lessons: this is addressed in a later section.

Choosing your tutor

Finding tutors used to be a tricky business involving newspaper classifieds, word-of-mouth and expensive agencies. Nowadays anyone can easily find tutors in their area via cost-effective websites, such as our very own FirstTutors.com. The core advantage of these sites is lack of agency fees, a cost which in some cases can amount to a lot of money for comparatively little benefit. But what exactly should you look for when choosing a teacher?

At the heart of any learning system lies the teacher/pupil relationship. For one-to-one tutoring more than any other system, developing a meaningful, positive and fun relationship is paramount. And like any meaningful human relationship, trust must be at its core. These considerations should be just as important as the tutor's level of expertise. After all, there would be no benefit learning from an eminent Professor if the personal connection was strained. If in doubt, it is a good idea to meet briefly with your tutor (or at least talk to them on the phone or online) on a casual basis to ascertain their personality and build rapport, and possibly learn more about their teaching ethos.

When considering your prospective tutor's approach to teaching, you have to take into account both your learning aims and what style of teaching works best for you. For example, a tutor with experience teaching in a Primary School may be better suited to younger kids, while a tutor with an academic background may be just what's needed if you are looking to master advanced concepts or analyse works of literature.

Practicalities

Safety

The first thing you should do, regardless of where you've decided to meet, is to check the tutor's photo ID, any DBS checks they profess, and any other supporting documentation they claim to have. Don't worry, they won't take offence at this; they know to expect this as professionals. It is worth noting, however, that DBS checks (once called CRB checks) are not available to private tutors as a matter of legislation, given that they're not in a 'sole position of care or supervisory role' so any tutors who have one will have received them in their capacity as school teachers.

Timing

If you are choosing a tutor for a child, we would recommend the following lesson durations:

Primary - 1 hour sessions maximum; 30 - 45mins is often preferred. To make such tuition worth your tutor's while you may wish to consider tutoring for more than one child, so the tutor can teach two children for half an hour each.

Secondary/GCSE - 1 hour is fine; 1.5 if your child has the stamina.

A-Level - 1 hour to 1.5 hrs if you are being tutored on a regular basis. 1.5 - 2.5+ hours if you are cramming before exams.

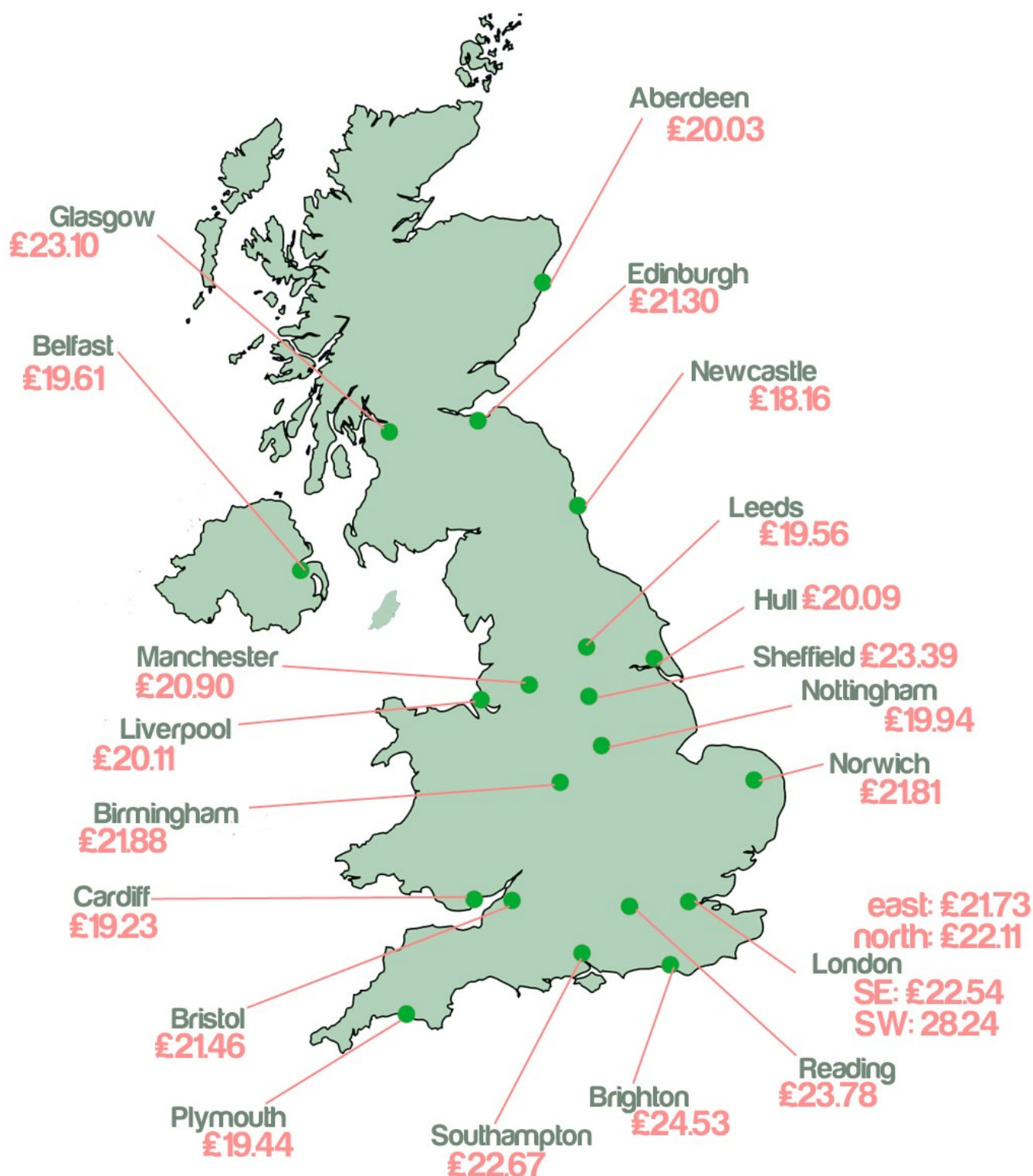
As for adult learners, you should learn for however long suits you. If that means an hour a few days a week, or a three hour marathon every few weeks, so be it. It is worth considering natural human limitations on concentration: within each of these time periods small breaks should be taken at least once every twenty minutes!

Cost

The cost of private tuition varies considerably according to subject, skill level and area. As a general rule, the more advanced the academic level, the higher the cost of tuition. This trend is bucked when one enters the world of adult tuition, which tends to be cheaper than its scholastic counterpart.

We have formulated some useful infographics showing the mean average price of tuition by educational level and by region. The data is derived from prices that our tens of thousands of tutors set themselves.





The costs shown in the above infographic are the mean average prices of private tuition per hour across all educational levels. Some are unsurprising, such as the cost in South-West London being the most expensive, but there are a few unexpected results, such as the average in Glasgow being more expensive than much of London!

The average of the averages, the benchmark cost for all UK Private Tuition, is **£21.55**.

Payment

The done thing is to pay tutors by the hour, promptly after every session.

First Lessons

We always recommend learning in a quiet environment so that tutor and tutee can work without disturbance. Please note that if the tutee is under 18 a parent or guardian should be present during lessons. If you have arranged to go to the tutor's home, please think safety first and ensure that you do not visit alone.

It is helpful to consider exactly what you want to achieve from your lessons, and to explain this to the tutor. The tutor may want to talk through your motivation for studying the subject in question, and may do some exercises with you to ascertain your skill level so far - don't be bashful, you're not supposed to be able to be an Einstein yet!

Ultimately, the first lesson is an opportunity to gauge your rapport with the tutor and their teaching style. Don't be afraid to ask your tutor to raise or ease the pace or difficulty of lessons; equally, if you would like to change anything about the lessons (direction, structure etc) just mention it to your tutor.

Specialist considerations: Music

Music's current place in the formal education system

In all of the schools where the National Curriculum sets out the compulsory subjects, music is included as one of the foundation subjects. It is compulsory at Key Stages 1,2 and 3 of school education with some schools offering them at the later stages with a potential to achieve a GCSE in music. You will have to check individual schools for more details about this option. The same goes for A levels, but taking an exam at this level at school is not very common among students as they still need to take separate Grade exams to get into Higher Education.

You can take Grade exams regardless of the type of education you are getting, whether it's school or personal tuition, as long you follow the rules of Grade examinations board. There is an option of skipping Grades 1-4, but Grade 5 acts as a gateway to gaining any further qualifications.

There are not that many specialist music schools in the UK as music specialisation is quite new, having been introduced in 2004. Specialist schools are still required to meet all requirements of the National Curriculum so these schools do not deviate from the existing statutory provision. What they are rather doing is creating additional educational value by putting extra emphasis on music teaching.

Universities in the UK provide a wide range of degrees in Performance Arts, which include music and singing. You can choose from classical performance to music production and recording, whichever you want to develop and work in. An alternative to a University degree is studying in a Conservatoire or music Academy which are also considered as higher education providers. They focus only on Arts degrees mostly related to music but also sometimes have courses in other arts. The Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music and Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts are the leading institutions in the

UK, students with deep pockets and an international longing may want to look at the prestigious Juilliard school in New York.

The role of private tuition

Music has an extremely important place in a person's development and has a great positive impact on the human psyche. It is therefore very important for children to have access to a musical education. Learning to sing in kindergarten or primary school is most children's first step into the world of music, but for some children there is no certainty that musical educational structures will be available for the duration of their education; while the UK government supports and recognises music as an enriching and valuable academic subject, funding for music programs can be patchy at best and non-existent at worst. This is where private tuition comes in: it provides a critical supplement to an area in which formal education is considerably lacking. For most music pupils, public education is their 'shadow education', with private tuition being the primary channel for their musical learning.

In part this is due to the dynamics of effective musical teaching. Classroom environments are notoriously ineffective in this regard: the one-on-one environment remains the optimum, something that schools lacking in funding will be hard pressed to provide.

Like academic tuition, the cost of music tuition varies by instrument and level.

Specialist considerations: Languages

The current place of languages in the formal education system

Learning a language gives you the keys to new cultures, communities and friendship groups. If you're thinking of relocating, making a business trip, travelling or just going on holiday, having even a basic command of the local language will enhance your experience no end. The more you develop linguistically, the more you can experience.

Language learning in public education is far more grounded than that of music. 'Modern Foreign Languages' form a core part of the National Curriculum after Key Stage 2, with most schools offering at least French, usually Spanish, and some other language of their choice. Pupils can take GCSEs and A-Levels in their newfound language, and practically all universities offer a strong range of languages at degree level. Many of these courses, even at school level, contain an element of travelling to the languages' host country; university courses often contain a Year Abroad option, allowing you to leave your comfort zone and have a life experience while learning your chosen language at the same time!

The role of private tuition

Still, the only thorough way to learn languages extra-curriculum in one's home country is through private tuition. After all, the scope of world language variety is truly staggering, with circa 7,300 main world languages, and an uncountable number of dialects. Having one-to-one lessons with a native speaker is a sure-fire way to quickly become at home in the language.

It should be noted that there is a distinction between learning a language for academic purposes and learning to speak it: when choosing a private tutor it would be wise to consider the tutor's experience, given that these two areas, while very similar, often have different aims and emphases. From what we can see, people seeking linguistic private

tuition often have practical, as opposed to academic, goals in mind.

Specialist considerations: Beyond academia

The sky is truly the limit in the world of private tuition: the learning model has the flexibility to cater to any and all needs, both mainstream and niche, short-term and long-term. As a consequence it is possible to find tutors teaching courses outside the remit of conventional academia. Below is a list of private tuition's most interesting directions, taken from the requests on our site.

- *coding*
- *business*
- *ballet*
- *yoga*
- *karate*
- *cooking*
- *fine art*
- *electronics*
- *game design*
- *elocution*
- *personal training*
- *leadership*

As you can see, it isn't all Maths and English!

The real lesson derived from all this is that private tuition, even in its current commercialised form, still constitutes a fundamental part of human education. We should look beyond the false concept of tuition as secondary to public education, and instead explore new ways the one-to-one tutor/pupil relationship can enrich learning structures in general.

Private tuition worldwide

Private tuition as a commercial sector has rapidly spread worldwide, especially in developing countries where exam-centric qualifications have become the benchline by which better life opportunities are created. It is particularly popular in Asia, where many countries have a fierce culture of private tuition.

In Hong Kong, private tutors are occasionally elevated to celebrity level. Their heavily styled and photoshopped headshots appear in ubiquitous adverts, they guest star on TV shows and get paid millions (admittedly for teaching enormous groups). 85% of primary age kids receive private tuition here. In South Korea, it's as high as 90%. Slightly lower down the scale, but still eclipsing UK percentages, are India and Kazakhstan, with 60%. In the UK, by comparison, it's close to 25%. This amounted to a total industry worth of roughly 6 billion. In Japan, the industry is worth 12 billion.

A report called *Shadow Education: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Implications for Policy Makers in Asia* discusses just why this might be. Firstly, education is very stratified in these regions. This is something rarely encountered in Britain, where the education system is comparatively unstratified, even when compared to somewhere like the US. Secondly, there is a common perception among parents in these countries that the extant public educational structures are insufficiently equipped to truly give their offspring the necessary foundation to better themselves. The third factor is growing family wealth vs. a lower number of children (especially in China and Hong Kong), meaning parents have more income to spend per child. This doesn't account for places like Pakistan, however, where the average spent per child per month on private tuition is \$3.40, and where over half that nation's population subsist on less than \$2 a day.

There is also a growing trend among the super-rich to hire private tutors for their children on a live-in, long-term basis, rendering them in charge of single child's education

for a few weeks to a whole year. This is a mixed bag, however, as tutors can often find their role closer to that of a governess than a formal tutor.

The Future

In what directions will private tuition take in the future? A lot depends on the changing structure of formalised public education, but it is probably safe to assume the following:

- The breadth of courses offered by private tutors will increase as globalisation makes more languages, cultural activities and disciplines internationally relevant.
- Worldwide demand will increase as more countries develop economically, creating a middle class with disposable income.
- Online tutoring, currently an emergent sector, will provide a new learning environment with many exciting possibilities.
- The web will help democratise private tuition, with more efficient practices rendering expensive agencies obsolete.
- The current trend towards a boon of freely (or cheaply) available knowledge will diversify the resources available to private tutors to use in teaching.

Throughout all this change, one thing will remain at the core: the ages-old tutor-tutee relationship that has been to foundation of human learning for millennia. Ultimately, all these processes serve to enhance and supplement this relationship, not to replace it.

Further reading:

Articles on academic tutoring:

<http://www.firsttutors.com/uk/articles/view.php>

Articles on Music tuition:

<http://www.firsttutors.com/uk/music/articles/view.php>

Case Study

<http://www.firsttutors.com/uk/articles/case-studies/from-the-students-mouth-how-my-private-tutor-helped-me.php>

Private Tuition Blog

<http://www.firsttutors.com/uk/blog/>

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