Research and analysis

Independent review of tutoring in 16 to 19 providers: phase 1 findings

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Applies to England

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Executive summary

The government has made tutoring a priority following the COVID-19 pandemic in order to help learners catch up. This is to help learners 'catch up' on the learning time that was lost during multiple lockdowns. Tutoring can be particularly helpful for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have been most affected by the disruption to their education.[footnote 1]

The evidence for the efficacy of tutoring is strong. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) highlights that personalised, frequent and consistent small-group tuition sessions can help struggling learners to make around 4 months' additional progress over the course of the academic year. However, tuition is also an expensive intervention.[footnote 2]

In July 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) published guidance on the 16 to 19 tuition fund.[footnote 3] The scheme provides additional, targeted financial support to the learners most affected by the pandemic. As part of its education recovery programme, the DfE has made available £500 million to 16 to 19 providers so that they can offer tutoring packages.

The DfE asked Ofsted to carry out an independent review of tutoring. This includes assessing the progress and, where possible, effectiveness of the government's National Tutoring Programme.[footnote 4] Our review focuses on tuition provided through the 16 to 19 tuition fund over 2 years, from September 2021. This report sets out the findings on 16 to 19 providers' use of the tuition fund from the first phase of our study.

Between September 2021 and July 2022, we carried out research visits to 21 further education (FE) and skills providers. These visits involved discussions with leaders, teachers, tutors and learners. We wanted to explore providers' tuition strategies and how well they had integrated these. His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) observed tuition sessions to see what learners were typically being taught and how effectively tutors were managing sessions.

The research visits demonstrated that **providers were using the fund**

differently and had interpreted ‘tuition’ activities in a variety of ways. This reflects the range of FE and skills programmes available, but also the broad scope and flexibility of the 16 to 19 tuition fund. Most providers offered tuition in maths and English as well as learners’ main academic, vocational or technical programmes. Others also included personal development or behaviour and attitude-related elements. As a result, providers sometimes offered support or enrichment activities, such as mentoring, under the fund.

Providers generally met the DfE’s expectations for the fund’s use. They assessed learners’ eligibility well, on the whole. However, the importance of small group sizes was not always well understood. Some groups were too large to allow the tutor to tailor the sessions to learners’ starting points, and they did not receive individual attention from a tutor. This meant that the sessions were unlikely to help learners to catch up. Most tutoring was open-ended. This was a positive thing when combined with ongoing, high-quality assessment to determine when tutoring should stop. We noted that, in some of these providers, tutors had not set clear goals or targets for learners based on their remaining knowledge gaps.

High-quality tutoring was aligned with the curriculum and tutors had accurately assessed the gaps in learners’ knowledge. Providers generally used some form of initial or regular summative assessment, along with teachers’ knowledge of learners’ progress, to identify which individuals needed tuition. In the best cases, teachers and tutors collaborated well and went back to the curriculum to identify the core knowledge that learners had either missed or did not fully understand. This work was critical to the success of the tutoring sessions. English and maths tutoring was not always well aligned with vocational programmes. In several cases, tutors were not working closely with vocational leads to identify gaps in learners’ understanding when they applied maths to the vocational curriculum.

In weaker cases, the content of tuition sessions was more generic and failed to identify the right starting point for learners. In about a quarter of providers, some tutoring sessions lacked planning and were instead open spaces to complete coursework assignments. This is not tutoring. In some academic sessions, the tutor relied too much on learners to choose the content that they wanted to focus on. In these cases, there tended to be a lack of planning and assessment. Typically, this led to sessions on revising

for exams rather than a focus on well-defined gaps in knowledge.

Tutors were often recruited from existing teaching staff and the quality of teaching was generally good. Teachers knew the curriculum well, which helped to align the tuition sessions to normal lessons. Their subject expertise and teaching skills often resulted in high-quality tutoring. **There were some recruitment challenges, particularly in vocational programmes**. Some providers recruited graduates as tutors because of challenges employing specialist teachers. These providers tried to recruit graduates with subject expertise in the area they were tutoring, as well as teaching or tutoring experience. However, this was not always possible. There were particular challenges recruiting specialist teachers for vocational and technical programmes.

Generally, the government's tutoring policy has been well received by providers. **Across 16 to 19 providers, leaders, staff and learners were overwhelmingly positive about tutoring**. Many suggested that tuition had re-engaged learners, increased their confidence and resilience, and changed their attitudes to learning. Some providers gave examples of progress based on solid formative assessment of learners receiving tuition.[footnote 5]

However, **most providers had not been delivering tuition for long enough to assess its impact on learners' progress**. Many providers acknowledged that they had not fully developed arrangements for overseeing and monitoring tuition.

Introduction

What is tutoring?

Tuition is an adaptive teaching intervention provided separately from normal class sessions. It helps learners to make progress through the curriculum by responding to identified gaps in their knowledge or skills.

Research literature suggests that tutoring is an effective intervention for raising learners' attainment, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.[footnote 6] The available studies to date have been carried out in schools. There is limited evidence of the impact of tutoring in 16 to 19 providers. However, many of the conditions that we describe in this report as impactful in schools are relevant to 16 to 19 providers as well. The DfE has drawn on this to set parameters, for example around group size, for use of the tuition fund.

Research evidence suggests that both one-to-one and small-group tuition are both effective in providing learners who have fallen behind with more instruction time.[footnote 7] Learners make strong progress with each approach (typically taking around 5 and 4 months, respectively), although there is a significant cost associated with implementing tuition programmes.

Tutoring is a form of adaptive teaching that should neither create artificial, distinct tasks for different groups of learners nor set lower expectations for them.[footnote 8] For instance, the EEF found that one-to-one tuition in schools has considerable impact if it is provided in addition to, and explicitly linked with, the curriculum of learners' normal lessons.[footnote 9] Small-group tuition is most likely to be effective if the group is as small as possible and the tuition focuses on learners' specific needs, identified beforehand through diagnostic assessment.[footnote 10]

The benefits of small-group tuition are the result of a customisation effect.[footnote 11] That is, tutoring interventions are an extreme case of class size reduction that better enable adaptive teaching. Tutoring, therefore, benefits learners by having teaching that better matches, and can be customised to, their needs. This is particularly the case when their current knowledge may mean that they are less able to follow along in classroom sessions. Tuition starts to become less effective when group sizes reach around 6 or 7 learners.[footnote 12]

Other aspects, including duration, time and frequency, influence the effectiveness of tutoring programmes.[footnote 13] Evidence on intensity suggests that multiple sessions per week have more impact than one per week.[footnote 14] Tutoring for adolescents has been shown to be more effective over extended periods.[footnote 15] Consistency is also an important factor. The more time that tutors spend with students, the stronger the bond

they develop,[footnote 16] which supports the learning process more broadly.[footnote 17] As a result, regularly changing tutors might affect the learner's progress and attitude to learning.

Most studies highlight that high-quality teaching is the most important factor in effective tuition.[footnote 18] For instance, the effectiveness of one-to-one or small group tutoring depends on the personal and professional characteristics of individual tutors. This includes their understanding, subject knowledge, assessment and teaching technique.[footnote 19] Furthermore, behaviours such as questioning and explaining can either create or undermine opportunities for learning.[footnote 20]

Tuition provided by qualified teachers has been shown to be more effective than tutoring provided by non-qualified teachers.[footnote 21] Where this is the case, it draws on teachers' knowledge of the school context and learners' needs, particularly what they already know.[footnote 22] Teaching assistants have also been shown to have an impact in one-to-one and small group settings. Crucially, however, positive effects of intensive instructional support are only observed when teaching assistants are provided with structured programmes and high quality support and training.[footnote 23]

What is the 16 to 19 tuition fund?

In July 2020, the DfE published its guidance on the 16 to 19 tuition fund.[footnote 24] The fund provides extra money to colleges and other 16 to 19 providers to help learners catch up after the disruption caused by the pandemic. The funds are provided through the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Initially, the fund was just for students who had not achieved a grade 4 or 5 in GCSE English and/or maths. The eligibility rules were expanded for the academic year 2021/22 to include disadvantaged students, which were defined as those from the 27% most economically deprived areas of the country, based on the index of multiple deprivation.

Aside from eligibility, the scope of the fund is relatively open. Though the eligibility rules specify low prior attainment in English and maths, tutoring

does not have to be in these subjects. Providers can also use the fund for other subjects that the pandemic has disrupted, including vocational and/or academic learning.

The guidance stipulates that providers should have regard to the needs of learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), particularly if they have experienced additional disruption to learning because of their specific needs and disabilities. In these cases, providers can use the fund to support eligible learners with SEND to catch up on vocational and academic knowledge and skills, and/or other knowledge and skills and learning that are important for their preparation for adulthood.

The guidance specifies that providers should use the fund to support tuition activity above and beyond the programmes of education already planned. There are some things that the fund should not be used for, such as room hire and equipment.

The DfE initially defined small groups as up to 3 students, with 5 students as the maximum allowed. In 2021/22, this was expanded to small groups of up to 5 students, or up to 7 students in exceptional circumstances.

The DfE does not specify who should deliver tuition. Providers can decide whether to deliver sessions themselves or to hire third parties of their choosing.

Methods

We agreed with the DfE that our review would focus on:

- how providers identified learners to receive tutoring
- the suitability of tutors
- how providers set up tutoring
- how well tutoring aligned with the intended curriculum
- the impact of tutoring
- the wider effects of tutoring in the provider

The full set of research questions are in our published terms of reference.[footnote 25]

We gathered evidence from research visits to 21 FE and skills providers during the 2021/22 academic year. This included:

- 11 general FE colleges
- 6 sixth-form colleges
- 3 independent learning providers
- 1 independent specialist college

A team of selected FE and skills HMI carried out the visits over the year, to provide consistency. The visits took place over 1 or 2 days, depending on how much tutoring the provider was offering learners.

During the research visits, we held discussions with leaders, teachers, tutors and learners to get a sense of the provider's tuition strategy and how well integrated it was. These discussions consisted of semi-structured interviews or focus groups, depending on the size of the institution. The discussions with learners were all carried out in a focus group. Importantly, inspectors also observed tuition sessions during each visit. They wanted to see what was typically being taught and how well tutors were managing sessions. This was essential for us to triangulate the evidence and identify the coherence between the planned tuition strategy and its practical implementation.

We selected providers in order to achieve a balanced yet varied sample, based on:

- provider type
- regional location
- provider size and amount of tuition funding awarded
- latest Ofsted overall effectiveness judgement (excluding inadequate providers)

All those who participated in the research did so voluntarily and gave consent.

Further details on the method, process of analysis and limitations of the

study are in Annex A.

Findings

There was a lot of variation in how leaders used the funding and interpreted ‘tuition’ activities

Almost all the providers could clearly explain how their use of the fund supported learners who needed help to catch up and for what activities they used it for that went above and beyond the programme of education they had already planned.

Senior leaders often said that the tuition fund made an important contribution to helping the most disadvantaged learners to catch up. As one principal said:

> “ Our curriculum strategy is all about access, so clearly the tuition fund is an important area of that… how can that extra support be used to enable those learners to have a better chance of bridging the divide.”

Leaders used the funding in different ways. This reflects the breadth of programmes available to learners across the FE and skills sector. It also reflects the broad scope and flexibility in the DfE’s guidance. As a result, the catch-up tutoring that inspectors observed across providers was diverse in focus. The majority tended to offer tuition in English and maths for learners without grade 4 or 5 GCSEs in these subjects. Most also offered tuition across academic, technical or vocational programmes. Some also used the fund to support learners with SEND, for example in independent living skills or other study programmes.

Across academic, technical and vocational programmes, we observed tuition in the following areas:

- maths and English, including GCSE resits and functional skills

other academic subjects, such as A-level sociology, law and Spanish

- vocational or technical areas, such as hair and beauty, health and social care, plumbing, arts and media, business, and carpentry
- English for speakers of other languages

Tutoring in vocational and technical areas often took the form of skills workshops, sometimes led by industry experts. Examples included:

- customer service workshops for learners on hair and beauty programmes
- 2-week programme on specialist machinery use (engineering)
- patisserie sessions

About a third of the providers offered interventions that focused on personal development or attitudes to learning. Leaders explained that they had set up these tutoring sessions because many learners were experiencing increased anxiety about education. After the disruptions of the pandemic, many lacked the confidence to access the curriculum or plan what to do next.

Providers defined most of these tutoring sessions as coaching or mentoring programmes that focused on employability, welfare and general study skills. They aimed to develop learners' confidence, engagement and aspirations. One provider offered workshops led by an external drama company to build confidence and develop employability skills. A small number of providers had used the fund to continue or expand on existing support or enrichment programmes.

The DfE's expectations of how tutoring should look were largely achieved, with some exceptions

Research on the impact of tutoring is clear that interventions are more effective if groups are very small.[footnote 26] About half of the providers we visited offered one-to-one tuition. Among those offering small-group tuition, the average group size was up to 5.

Many of the learners and teachers we spoke to said that the size of tutor groups was important. Small groups helped to increase a learner's

confidence and motivation. This is because tutors could give them individual attention, and they had more opportunities to speak out and be heard. For instance, a learner in a sixth-form college said: ‘It’s a small class so you feel comfortable with the people you are with, so feel more able to speak to each other and ask questions.’

In about a quarter of cases, group size was sometimes between 5 to 7 learners. This is acceptable under the DfE’s guidance, however, leaders did not provide reasons for these decisions. In 4 providers, we saw group sizes of more than 7. In groups of this size, tutoring is likely to have less impact. This is because the content is not adapted to the learners’ needs and they do not receive individual attention. As several learners receiving small group sessions suggested, ‘When there’s less of us, we can go into more detail than we would in our class.’

Researchers do not agree on the ideal number of tutoring sessions for maximum impact. However, intensive, short-term provision has been shown to be more effective. When there is no end point to tutoring, there is a risk that other learners who would benefit from tutoring may not be able to start, as some learners remain on the programme for the entire year. The criteria for the 16 to 19 tuition fund did not set limits on the length of a programme of tutoring. As a result, there was wide variation in the length of programmes that providers offered.

In many of the providers, learners attended tutoring for much of the academic year. Some providers could give an idea of the average number of sessions completed. General FE colleges and independent learning providers were the most flexible in the length of provision. In sixth-form colleges, tutoring programmes were more time-limited and usually had a set number of sessions. However, in most cases, tutoring could continue if assessment showed that learners continued to have gaps in knowledge. Flexible end points can benefit learners if they are used in conjunction with clear targets and effective assessment processes. However, in cases where tutoring was provided on a continuous basis, this was sometimes lacking.

Providers largely followed the DfE’s eligibility criteria and selected learners appropriately, though the extent to which

they identified specific deficits varied

Almost all providers closely followed the DfE's eligibility criteria for the tuition fund. This meant that learners were eligible if they did not have a grade 4 or 5 GCSE in maths and English, or they were disadvantaged. Along with eligibility, providers used a range of assessment information to identify individual learners in need of tuition and to make sure that tuition was targeted appropriately.

Effective tutoring focuses on gaps in learners' knowledge and skills that prevent them from making progress. Research on tutoring has shown that the best way to determine which learners will benefit is an assessment process that precisely identifies these gaps.[footnote 27]

To identify learners in need, most providers drew on initial assessment of learners at the start of their programmes or on regular summative assessment. In line with the criteria, many providers referred to GCSE exam grades to identify learners. Others used regular assessment points during the term, such as mock exams, half-termly assessments or assessments of learners' starting points. The latter included diagnostic tests, which are a range of assessments used to determine learners' current knowledge in a topic area. Many providers said they combined assessment information with teachers' knowledge of learners' progress to identify who would benefit from tuition.

In general FE and sixth-form colleges, it was common for providers to take a departmental approach, whereby leaders gave curriculum managers responsibility for managing tutoring. Managers and teachers drew on their understanding of learners' specific needs to evaluate the need for tutoring. Often, they considered multiple factors. This included learners' summative assessment results and teachers' assessment of their work, progress, attitudes, and the impact of the pandemic on their social skills. As a result, managers, teachers and tutors worked closely together to monitor gaps and review learners' progress. Identification processes in these providers were effective because they drew on formative assessment rather than just summative assessment results.

For example, at one sixth-form college, learners completed 10 assessments across the academic year. The first 2 assessments diagnosed gaps in

learners' knowledge and skills, which gave teachers an accurate understanding of their individual needs. Tutors and teachers built on their assessments to monitor learners' progress through monthly reports and meetings. Managers used this information to plan additional tutoring sessions and place learners in the right group for their needs.

Several providers used established progression and academic review cycles to identify learners for catch-up sessions. They selected those who were below their expected level or predicted grade. However, the providers did not supplement this with diagnostic and formative assessment to make sure specific gaps were being identified and addressed in sessions.

In 2 of the independent learning providers, leaders did not check eligibility at all, and used the funding to provide extra support sessions for all learners. Learners could not distinguish tutoring from regular teaching sessions. Most learners at these providers were from disadvantaged backgrounds and would have been eligible for funding in any case. However, in one provider, the class size was larger than a tutoring session should be. This meant that the session content was not customised to the individual learners. In the other provider, classes were very small and so the tutor was able to give highly individualised support in the sessions.

As discussed, different providers offered learners tuition in different programme areas. In many, catch-up tutoring was available in various subjects. Leaders decided which programmes to target by drawing on assessment information and consulting teachers. This led to a focus on the subjects in academic or vocational programmes that had been most disrupted by the pandemic, in terms of missed learning and disrupted work placements, or with a high proportion of eligible learners with a specific need. For example, learners on several hairdressing courses lacked some technical and customer service skills.

In line with the criteria, some providers were paying particular attention to learners with SEND and providing tuition in independent living skills. Some initially prioritised the year groups most affected by disruption or who were closest to the end of their qualifications.

Tutoring sessions were usually appropriately embedded in learners' timetables

In the majority of providers, the timing of tutoring sessions was well coordinated so that sessions did not interrupt timetabled lessons. This meant that learners were not disadvantaged by missing lessons that their peers were attending.

Managers timetabled tutoring during learners' free periods and lunch breaks, as well as early in the morning or at the end of the day. Additionally, inspectors found several examples of learners accessing tutoring during termly breaks.

However, this was not the case at one college, where almost all tutoring happened in existing planned lesson time. This meant that learners were often missing out on their planned vocational and practical learning, at a risk of adding to gaps in their knowledge.

In a few providers, tutoring sessions were optional or learners could self-refer for support. In some providers where learners were having one-to-one tutoring, they arranged their own sessions with their tutors, based on their availability. In some of these cases, providers reported low attendance and difficulties with engaging learners. This also correlated with less forward planning and less structured tutoring. Learners' attendance was better when it was clearly planned into timetables, with the expectation that attendance would be high, and attendance was recorded.

Providers did not always monitor attendance carefully, which meant that they were less able to assess the impact of sessions.

Tutoring that was well-aligned with the curriculum had been planned to follow the curriculum closely to close gaps in individuals' knowledge

In the stronger examples of academic and vocational tutoring seen, inspectors noted that the content of sessions was firmly rooted in the provider's curriculum. Tutors had planned sessions logically to develop

learners' understanding, directly related to the curriculum, over time.

Learners had individualised goals that linked clearly to the areas of the curriculum where they needed the most support, as identified through assessment. For example, at one sixth-form college, teachers identified from assessments that some A-level English language learners were not using linguistic terminology very well. They planned a 4-week tuition curriculum to teach a 'toolkit' of linguistic terms. They planned this logically, addressing individual learners' knowledge gaps and building their confidence over time. An inspector observed the week 2 session on verbs and participles. The tutor progressively introduced more complex concepts. This included verb and noun phrases with participles, which learners had practised in previous sessions. Inspectors observed learners recalling present, past and future participles in a sentence and using them in the right contexts.

Assessing individual gaps in component knowledge is vital in effective tutoring. In another college, learners were selected for maths tutoring based on results from initial and diagnostic assessments to identify those struggling with the curriculum, regardless of their prior attainment. Teachers worked closely with tutors to highlight the essential underpinning knowledge that learners needed to improve on. For example, teachers collaborated with tutors to set tasks based on the key knowledge needed to divide and multiply so that learners could progress in the topic of fractions. Maths tutoring at this provider was also well aligned with learners' vocational programme. As a result, a learner studying baking talked about the relevance of ratios and consistency of ingredients. He explained how his maths tutor had helped relate this to measurements in his baking course.

Inspectors saw examples of tuition sessions in technical and vocational subjects that were well-aligned with the curriculum. These included:

- tutoring sessions for hairdressing that taught learners the best stance and posture for working on hair that promotes good long-term physical health while ensuring that they give clients an even and consistent cut
- local employers running sessions for hairdressing learners on front of house skills, which meant that learners received individualised support that focused on the social skills they lacked; the provider did this after a 6-week diagnostic test revealed that learners had fallen behind with

customer service skills

- tutoring sessions for business studies learners that followed the scheme of work but that also focused on the specific knowledge learners needed to make progress in the curriculum; for example, some learners were working on aspects of ratio analysis and others were revisiting profit and loss accounts

Weaker providers had not customised the content of tutoring sessions by assessing gaps in individual learners' skills and knowledge

In about a quarter of the providers, the content of some academic and vocational tutoring sessions was generic; that is, it was not customised for individual learners. This usually correlated with larger group sizes.

These sessions tended to cover a general recap of curriculum content. This was rather than a focused recap of the parts of the curriculum each learner needed to understand. For example:

- in one college, the inspector commented that maths tuition sessions were a direct 'follow-on' from the GCSE teaching sessions that learners attended earlier in the day; a tutoring session repeated the content of the earlier class with no plan to address individual gaps.
- in another college, vocational tutoring sessions were seen as open sessions to complete coursework assignments, with some support provided, and were not planned
- some providers used the tuition fund to deliver missed vocational content to whole groups of learners; in some cases, group sizes were too large and sessions did not provide learning that was customised for individuals based on diagnosed gaps in their skills

Repetition of curriculum content, such as through revision sessions, is a highly appropriate teaching strategy to make sure learners have learned the curriculum securely. However, tuition should focus on identifying and filling specific gaps in individuals' knowledge so that they can access the curriculum.

In one provider, maths tuition sessions repeated the content of earlier teaching sessions. However, provision was stronger here because the teacher – who was also the tutor – used the tuition sessions as extra time to identify misconceptions. The small group size meant that learners could receive individualised attention to address gaps in their understanding.

In some cases, the content of academic tutoring sessions was primarily decided by learners, who highlighted areas where they needed extra guidance. This was not always effective practice; in some cases, it slowed down the sessions considerably. There was also a lack of planning and assessment. This meant that some sessions focused too much on practising exam questions rather than on well-defined gaps in learners' knowledge and skills.

Strong collaboration between teachers and tutors was evident in the most effectively planned tutoring

When tutors were the learners' current teachers or teaching assistants, they knew the curriculum well. When they were not, collaboration with teaching staff was important in ensuring that tuition was well aligned with the curriculum. In some providers, tutors and subject leads had formal meetings to plan content and discuss learners' progress. This sometimes formed part of teachers' line management of tutors.

Typically, when teachers and tutors planned the content of tutoring sessions together, they reviewed assessment information to write a tuition curriculum that met learners' needs. For example, at one provider, the tutor planned a short A-level Spanish programme alongside the Spanish subject lead. The tuition programme helped learners who were struggling with conversation to improve. It did this by providing focused support to explore the historical and cultural topics covered in the broader curriculum. As a result, learners improved on the gaps in their vocabulary and contextual knowledge to draw on in conversations.

In other cases, tutors collaborated informally through short conversations with subject leads. This tended to work well when tutors shared offices with

teachers or attended the same meetings, as there were more opportunities to communicate. In some cases, tutors also planned content by accessing information on learners and the scheme of work through shared systems. Teachers made suggestions about content to tutors through their informal interactions or by sharing notes. In one college, teachers created a bank of resources for tutors to draw on to make sure the content was at the right level for the course. Informal collaboration was considered a strength, provided there were regular opportunities for it. This is because it allowed for ongoing discussion about learners' progress.

Often, English and maths tutoring was not well aligned with vocational programmes. For instance, several maths teachers and tutors were not working closely with vocational leads to identify gaps in learners' understanding when they applied maths to the vocational curriculum.

For example, in one college, learners in construction were learning about contextualised maths when calculating volumes of concrete, bricks and timber. Those in engineering were using strict industrial tolerances related to machining and computer numeric control. At the same time, learners were covering these topics in tutoring sessions, without any joined-up planning. This meant tuition was not addressing underlying gaps in learners' knowledge; tutors and teachers were not working together to understand where the gaps were for learners on vocational programmes who were also accessing tutoring.

In another college, teachers and tutors acknowledged that they could have worked more closely with the vocational team to make sure that learners could practise their mathematics skills in their main subject. Inspectors also commented that fashion students could have applied their understanding of percentages, area and shape when planning and cutting fabric for various garments.

Tutoring was often delivered by existing teaching staff, though some providers commissioned industry experts for vocational areas

Almost all the providers deployed existing teaching staff to deliver at least

some of their tutoring sessions. This typically involved using the tuition fund to increase part-time teachers' hours or building time for tutoring into existing teachers' timetables. As a result, much of the tutoring we observed was provided by specialist qualified teaching staff. This meant that tutors often knew their learners' needs well at the start of tutoring and understood the curriculum thoroughly. Leaders and staff felt that this helped tutors to build good relationships with learners quickly.

Many of the providers who recruited new tutors sought experienced subject teachers. However, some reported recruitment challenges, for example in finding maths specialists. As a result of these challenges, just under a quarter of providers recruited recent graduates as tutors instead. In most of these cases, providers recruited graduates with a specialism in the subject area they would be tutoring, or who had a degree in a closely related discipline. They also prioritised tutors with experience in teaching, tutoring or working with young people, though they did not always manage to recruit them. In some cases, teaching assistants applied for new tutoring roles and received training from providers.

Two colleges told us that it was particularly challenging to recruit specialist tutors in technical areas, especially in engineering and construction. They therefore appointed internal staff to cover technical subjects. Others hired external specialists or companies to help learners catch up with learning the skills they had missed in vocational subjects. For example, half of the tutors at one college were industry specialists recruited to deliver technical sessions. These included specialists from animation and digital companies, as well as engineers who taught technical equipment training in tuition sessions. Teachers and heads of departments nominated eligible learners for technical support sessions according to need. Heads of departments ensured that there was a clear link between tutoring and what was taught in the classroom.

At another college, hair and beauty learners lacked confidence and had fallen behind in developing their technical skills. In response, local hair and beauty companies were funded to run sessions with eligible learners. The number of sessions attended depended on individual learners' needs.

One provider reported challenges in monitoring the work of an external company, which did not feed back adequate information on learners'

progress. However, the small number of providers who commissioned external tutors were positive about the benefits of this, such as the quality of tutoring sessions and specialisms in particular subjects.

The tutoring practice observed was usually of a good standard

In many providers, staff were recruited into tutor roles. This meant they were often qualified teachers with subject specialisms. In observations, inspectors saw the results of this. This included tutors:

- using their subject knowledge and teaching skills to explain concepts clearly to learners
- assessing learners' understanding and pacing sessions well: 'With it all being a one-to-one, it's all about me and what I can understand. If I get it, we just move on, to the things I find hard.' [Learner, Independent learning provider]
- planning questions so that learners could link previous learning to current questions.
- giving appropriately targeted feedback
- where necessary, setting work that stretched learners and challenged them to recall and build deeper knowledge
- using effective questioning to correct errors and misconceptions and build learners' understanding

Specialist tutors in vocational subjects also gave clear demonstrations and explanations that helped learners to fully understand what they were being taught. For example, in a food studies patisserie session, a tutor gave a very clear one-to-one demonstration of icing techniques. The learner was observed successfully icing on their own and later commented on this as an area they had improved in. Specialist vocational tutors also drew on their expertise to demonstrate how to use specialist terminology.

Inspectors also observed weaker examples of tutoring. In one, the tutors' feedback was too positive. The tutor did not explain clearly enough how learners could improve the standard of their work. In another example, the tutor did not check on learners' progress, or provide individualised activities,

and learners appeared disengaged. Not all graduates recruited were subject specialists or qualified teachers. Some learners, and teachers, said learners would have gained more from tutoring if their tutors had been experts in the subject area.

Learners were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of tutoring

Despite the differences in the quality of tutoring among providers, learners were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. Whilst this does not necessarily demonstrate they were making progress, learners valued the sessions highly. Examples of aspects of tutoring that learners valued included:

- an improved understanding of aspects of their programmes and learning more because of tutoring: ‘You learn so much more… something has just clicked.’ [Learner, Sixth-form college]
- the small-group format making learners feel comfortable to speak out: ‘It’s a small class so you feel comfortable with the people you are with, so feel more able to speak to each other and ask questions.’ [Learner, Sixth-form college]
- related to this, learners feeling more confident and able to contribute in other lessons: ‘I feel more confident. If I don’t understand I feel more confident to ask again.’ [Learner, Independent learning provider] ‘I’ve become more sociable with people… I used to be really quiet but now I can be the loud one in class.’ [Learner, Independent learning provider]
- the individual attention given in sessions, with learners often commenting on the positive relationship they had with their tutor: ‘She helps us to gain independence. She does not just tell us. She asks, what do you think?’ [Learner, Sixth-form college]
- feeling less anxious and having higher self-worth, which both learners and teachers reported on. Learners had a better outlook on study and, in some cases, progression: ‘I had an anxiety problem. Didn’t think school was for me… At first, I didn’t like [tutoring], but once I started to get used to it, I really warmed up to it and it made me look further into education.’ [Learner, Independent learning provider)

Staff and learners perceive that tutoring is having a positive impact but not all leaders really know if it is working

Many leaders and teachers told us that tutoring was having a positive impact on learners. They described benefits that aligned with what learners told us, particularly improved confidence:

“There is lots of maths fear and anxiety. Small groups help to overcome this by building up confidence” [Tutor].

“Learners feel they can speak more in small sessions, which leads to them contributing more in other classes” [Teacher].

Teachers said that learners’ focus and organisation had improved. They had better presentation skills, and worked better in teams, and more efficiently. Some learners who had missed exams because of lockdowns said that tutoring helped them to understand the requirements of exams and be better prepared. This in turn had reduced their anxiety about exams.

Learners provided inspectors with examples of progress that they had made in their tutoring sessions that helped them in regular classes. They described improvements they had made in maths, English and other subjects, for example:

- ‘I have improved my punctuation. English is my second language so extra tutoring is helping me to learn more English and avoid mistakes.’ [Learner, General FE college]
- ‘I have become better at dividing fractions and using algebra.’ [Learner, General FE college]
- in one college, learners referred to specific knowledge they had gained to understand transformations in maths and algebra
- a learner on a level 2 maths programme said they could do long multiplication after working on this in tuition sessions
- a business studies student said they better understood costing and purchasing, which they had struggled with before tutoring

Learners also closed gaps in practical skills. In one college, learners on a hairdressing course described how they had improved in various skills through tutoring sessions. For some, this was blow-drying techniques and cutting; others had built confidence in reception work through a session on customer service skills. One learner described learning to work within commercial timings.

At another provider, a bakery learner developed skills in icing in a patisserie session. Another learner found pastry lining particularly challenging, and received extra guidance on this in a tutoring session. Extra tuition meant these learners could improve and practise the specific skills they needed to develop. Teachers noted they were on their way to achieving the level of mastery required.

Another example included tutoring staff working with managers closely to design individualised support for learners with high needs based on the aspects of self-care, home care and food preparation that they needed to catch up in. As a result, learners developed independent living skills in personal hygiene, laundry and vacuuming.

Stronger tutoring providers had effective means of formative assessment in place to identify learner progress, as in the above examples.[footnote 28] However, many leaders and managers acknowledged that they had not yet developed efficient means of assessing learners' progress through tutoring or back in the classroom. Although many tutors used assessment well for diagnosis, not all were reviewing progress to identify whether the gaps were closed after the tuition sessions.

In many cases, teachers and learners described the impact of tutoring in terms of summative results or were awaiting the outcomes of end-of-year assessments to comment on impact. Some providers judged whether tutoring worked according to whether there had been a general improvement in grades, or progress ratings, across the whole group rather than evidence that learners knew and could do more.

Annex A: Further details on methods

Sampling issues

It was sometimes challenging to recruit providers to participate in the review. In the spring term of 2022, this was sometimes related to COVID-19. In the summer term, some learners had already finished their tutoring programmes after completing exams. This meant that there were no sessions to observe, or providers were busy focusing on exams.

In both instances, principals said they could not commit to the research because of the additional workload and burden on staff, although many were interested in doing so later in the year once these issues had alleviated. This has some implications for selection bias. While we were able to secure replacement providers from a back-up sample, it was not always possible to secure a like-for-like replacement in terms of all selection variables. Table 1 provides a breakdown of participating providers by type of institution.

Table 1: Participants by provider type

Provider type	Number of visits
General FE colleges	11
Sixth-form colleges	6
Independent learning providers	3
Independent specialist colleges	1
Total visits	21

Structure of the visits

Figure 1 shows how a typical tutoring research visit might look like:

- meeting with senior leadership team
- interview with the subject or programme lead
- interview with a tutor
- observation of 2 tutoring sessions
- focus group with teachers
- focus group with learners
- an informal meeting with senior leadership at the end of the visit

It was not possible for the activities of each visit to follow such a rigid structure. When and where tutoring sessions took place often determined the order of activities.

We gave providers the flexibility to determine a schedule that would minimise the additional burden on their staff. However, we also needed to ensure that we could capture the necessary data to inform the sector of the wider strengths and weaknesses of current tutoring provision.

We ensured that all the activities were carried out on each visit. This meant that, through triangulation, we could establish a coherent overview of the intent and implementation of the tutoring provided, which gave some assurance on the effectiveness of the programme.

Figure 1: Flexible schedule for research visits

Data collection and research instruments

Most of the visits were carried out by a single HMI. On 4 visits, a researcher from our research and evaluation team joined the HMI to help with collecting data.

As well as collecting the primary data from the visits, we also asked

inspectors to evaluate the evidence they had collected to explain the effectiveness of the provision they had seen. Although much of the data collected during the study was based on participants' views, we have also included observations of tutoring sessions and a wider investigation into curriculum alignment.

The external literature available combined with our expectations of the quality of education from the education inspection framework (EIF) gave us valid criteria to determine the strengths and weaknesses of tutoring across the sample. This means that we have confidence our review can comment on the impact of tutoring beyond individuals' perceptions.

Analysis methods

We used a thematic approach to coding the data collected from the research visits. We developed a coding framework using the available research literature and the quality of education concepts from the EIF. However, we also applied an inductive approach to identify new themes as they emerged from the data. We imported the data from the visits into MaxQDA, our qualitative data analysis tool, to carry out the analysis.

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27. 'Small group tuition', Education Endowment Fund, July 2021. ↩
28. Our review, however, has not been designed to comment on attribution – that is, the extent to which gains in learners' progress come from tutoring over main teaching and general progression across other subjects. ↩

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