

# Why should you watch the private tuition space?

By Melissa McBride, Founder and CEO, Sophia Technologies



When it comes to innovation and investment, creative minds are often quick to turn to technology first - that's the future, right? It's cutting-edge and exciting; it's fundamentally improving lives, from our relationships with finance to our everyday shopping journeys; and it's breathing life into our sci-fi imaginings. But this tunnel vision approach means that often, crucial sectors are overlooked and left way behind when it comes to innovation and development. Let's think about education, and even more specifically, the private tuition sector. Why should we be paying more attention to this space?

## The rise of private tuition

My own daughter just completed the 11+ entry process. As a headteacher I would have thought I knew what was coming. But I have to admit, the sparks for Sophia began to fly as a result of the tantrum and tears (mine and hers) over her 11+ preparation homework at the Sunday Morning breakfast table. That was when I first started looking into the private tuition sector and identified a gap in the market where on-demand mobile technology and the need for regulation were concerned.

The Sutton Trust's annual survey of secondary school students in England and Wales showed that 27% of 11 to 18-year-olds in England and Wales have received private tuition, a figure that rises to 41% in London. This is up from 18% in 2005,

and rising to 34% in "high-affluence" households across the UK.

The reason for the rapid growth is simple - the value parents place on the education of their children. As the education system in the UK, and in many worldwide markets, continues to struggle under the weight of increasing pupil numbers, teacher shortages and shrinking budgets, parents are seeking new ways of providing their children with an advantage over their peers, in an increasingly competitive environment. Higher Education support is also at an all-time high and professionals are also increasingly looking for support to develop new skill sets or explore passions.

## Global market

In international settings, English-speaking International schools, known for their high standards of teaching and learning, are highly competitive and selective. The market for these so-called 'transition' economies is being driven by the richest 5% of non-English speaking families, who are looking for places for their children in international schools in their own home countries, or overseas places at prestigious UK or US independent schools. This has a direct impact on the rise of the private tuition industry in these global markets.

With the numbers of foreign students studying at UK universities increasing, and the rising cost of university school fees playing as a factor, higher education tuition is a segment of the market that not only has untapped growth potential, but is also a significant revenue generator, due to the higher fees associated with this area of specialist tuition.

## Multi-billion sector

The rapid increase in private tutoring was initially most prominent in Asia and other regions then followed. Financial reports vary when it comes to the global private tuition market, some predict it will reach more than US\$200 billion by 2022. Current UK figures balance between £2 billion up to £6.5 billion!

This is in part down to supplementary tuition having become a social norm, and partly as a result of the fierce competition over places at top universities, seen as a straightforward route to a successful career path, which requires only the very

best of A-Level grades.

## More and more parents are turning to/into tutors

Numbers are numbers, but at the end of the day, business is all about people, their struggles and needs.

In areas where there are grammar schools, parents want to give their children a greater opportunity to pass the 11+ exam. If their child does pass their 11+, it also can save them over £140,000 over the cost of sending their child to a private school because they have failed it.

The 'Sunday morning crisis moment' over the Maths homework left me wishing we could get a brilliant tutor to the house.

A tutor who would match the standards expected from the staff I employed in my schools as a Headteacher. A tutor who could be booked in the same easy way that we now book taxis, massage therapy, babysitters and GPs. Sophia is the UK's first mobile app that takes the stress away from parents. It provides safe, high-quality tuition; face-to-face, whenever you want it, wherever you need it.

As a former teacher and headteacher, I know the education services industry inside out. As a mother of three, I know how much parents care about the safety of their children. I have realised that we are missing the Safer Recruitment Process used in schools, given that private tutors are working within our own homes (!) and 1:1 with our children. The sector lacks verifications that would ensure the person who spends time with your child is suitably qualified with verified professional references. Enhanced DBS Checks and Insurance (Public Liability and Professional Indemnity), which should be in place for any self-employment, are lacking in the private tuition sector.

Now back to the innovation and investment. You can watch your favourite football game with a VR headset on (which is certainly exciting!), but at the same time, we miss basic services in crucial sectors like education. Turbulences in the wider system, the need for quality education and questions of children safety - they are here to stay. It's for us, entrepreneurs and innovators, to identify the burning needs of the day-to-day lives and help the growing market thrive. Innovative technologies help many sectors and can help education as well, but that's another story.