

Tutorfair foundation

Teach Westminster 2021

Engaging Young Volunteers in Westminster



Westminster
Foundation

“Overall, I have found the experience rewarding, especially when seeing the improvement my tutee was able to make over the few short weeks that we had worked together.”

Young Volunteer

“[My son] was totally resistant to the idea of tutoring. But today when I asked him how the lesson went I could see that he enjoyed it. Pretty sure I saw a glimpse of a smile! I think the sharing of [the Tutor’s] experience of school was key. Thank [him] for his patience and understanding.

Parent

“Challenging but at the same time an extremely valuable experience. It allowed me to improve my communication skills massively as well as organising my time productively and discovering new interests.”

Young Volunteer

Executive Summary

Teach Westminster is a project conceived collaboratively by Tutorfair Foundation and *Global Teaching Alliance* – a group of young volunteers from Westminster. The purpose of the project is twofold: to provide one-to-one academic support to Key Stage 3 students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Westminster and to empower young voices to effect positive change in their community.

Opportunities to meaningfully involve young volunteers in educational programmes are hard to come by. Whilst young people are often consulted in their capacity as the beneficiaries of charitable programmes, it is less common for them to be able to lead on the design and delivery of the programmes themselves. When *Global Teaching Alliance* approached Tutorfair Foundation to discuss this project, it was clear that such an opportunity had arrived.

Lots of work was required in the early stages of this programme to determine how best this could be achieved, as working with young volunteers represents several unique challenges. Thanks to the cooperation of their school, parents and guardians, a safe and transparent working relationship was established, with volunteers vetted and DBS-checked as tutors whilst still being safeguarded as young people.

Together, Tutorfair Foundation and *Global Teaching Alliance* designed a plan for a 6-week pilot project to be delivered over the summer holiday of 2021. This plan was submitted to Westminster Foundation who generously agreed to fund the work and expenses of Tutorfair Foundation. The grant was awarded in mid-June, and preparation got underway in earnest from that point.

The initial plan had been for 10 young volunteers to deliver a minimum of 60 hours' tutoring to 10 Key Stage 3 students from 26th July to 3rd September 2021. Local schools, charities and education programmes were contacted to provide student referrals to the programme including Westminster City School and Westminster Befriend a Family. However, fewer volunteers than expected were available through the summer and some unexpected delays meant that tutoring started a week later than planned on 3rd August. By September, 7 volunteers had provided 47 hours of tutoring to 7 students.

The young volunteers acquitted themselves excellently in their lessons. They demonstrated a fantastic attitude towards planning and preparing for sessions and their teaching generated excellent feedback from students and parents alike. It was clear early in the pilot that the students were responding extremely well to working with a role model only a few years ahead of them in their education.

Feedback from the end of the programme supports this picture, with students unanimously approving of their tutors and feeling as though the teaching had boosted their confidence and improved their understanding. Students and tutors both gave high overall ratings to their experience and reported that the experience had been enjoyable and beneficial.

I am pleased to say that *Global Teaching Alliance*, Tutorfair Foundation and Westminster Befriend a Family have all indicated that they would like to build from this pilot and provide more tutoring together in the near future. Several key learnings and recommendations for future programmes have been outlined at the end of this report, including changes to training, administration and communication throughout the project.



Joss Serrailier
Foundation Director

Project Delivery

Due to a slightly lower-than-expected involvements from the initial group of 12 volunteers and due to a slightly delayed start to the programme, the pilot delivered fewer hours of tutoring (47) than the expected minimum of 60. Fewer tutors meant fewer beneficiaries engaged – but two of the participating volunteers did make up for lost capacity by offering tutoring to more than one student each.

Objective	Target	Outcome	Performance
Number of beneficiaries engaged	10	7	70%
Number of young volunteers engaged	10	7	70%
Hours of tutoring delivered	60	47	78%
Average hours' teaching per beneficiary	6	6.7	112%
Overall student attendance	90%	91%	101%

Project Timeline

Phase	Dates (2021)	Activities
Planning	15 th February	Initial meeting with Global Teaching Alliance
	6 th May	Planning meeting with Global Teaching Alliance
	27 th May	Grant application submitted
	13 th June	Meeting with Westminster Befriend a Family
	18 th June	Grant awarded
Preparation	23 rd June	Second planning meeting with Global Teaching Alliance
	7 th July	Outreach to Westminster schools begins
	8 th July	First tutor training session
	8 th July	Administrative tasks given to volunteers
	20 th July	Second tutor training session
Delivery	26 th July	Proposed start date
	3 rd August	First day of tutoring
	10 th August	All participating volunteers complete administrative tasks
	19 th August	Mid-project meeting with Global Teaching Alliance
	2 nd September	End-of-project meeting with Global Teaching Alliance
	3 rd September	Final day of tutoring
	6 th September	Follow-up and debrief with IC from Global Teaching Alliance

About the Young Volunteers

All of the volunteers taking part in this programme had just completed either Year 12 or 13 at Westminster Academy, meaning that their ages ranged from 17 to 19 years old. All were members of *Global Teaching Alliance (GTA)* – a group established in the previous year for the purpose of providing voluntary educational support to disadvantaged young people around the world.

Their initial vision had been to offer online tutoring and mentoring to young people in Pakistan attending schools that delivered the International Baccalaureate curriculum. These plans were put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once schools in the UK reopened, *GTA* reached out to Tutorfair Foundation for help and support in reaching young people closer to home at a difficult time.

Initially comprising a team of 12 young volunteers, the group eventually narrowed to 7 tutors who were available to take part in the pilot programme through the 6-week summer holiday. 2 of the 7 had some form of tutoring experience before this project, with the rest being entirely new to it.

Within the group there was some existing hierarchy, with a handful of the older volunteers in leadership roles. These were the young people who initially approached Tutorfair Foundation and were most involved in the early discussions about the purpose and design of the project. Just one of these leaders was available to take part in the project and played a crucial role in managing and communicating with their peers.

After the programme, volunteers were invited to reflect on their experience and write a short statement in response to the following prompt: *“Please describe how you have found the experience, including any challenges you faced, anything you learned and any thoughts and feelings you have about the project.”* Their responses are included below.

One of the key requirements of tutoring is being able to discover the capabilities of your tutee as quickly and as effectively as possible, which is a skill that depends on already existing skills but also practice. For myself, I found that I would on occasion overestimate the capabilities of my tutee, who is mathematically very capable (often well beyond the expected level of her age). This meant that I sometimes assumed her level for other topic areas to be equally strong, which at times turned out to not be the case.

Even though this often turns out to be a minor error it can have larger more complicated consequences such as the tutee's loss of confidence in this particular area or subject (which is the exact opposite effect that a tutor wants to have) addressing this for new tutors could really help boost their confidence and that of their tutees.

Overall, I have found the experience rewarding, especially when seeing the improvement my tutee was able to make over the few short weeks that we had worked together. These improvements were often most visible when I had taken the time and effort to explain a concept in multiple different ways (I would do this whenever I felt that the tutee had not understood the first explanation that had been given, or simply made the same mistake repeatedly even after different explanations).

*The only true difficulty that arose during this project was the communication with my fellow tutors from *GTA* (who I was helping to organise). Addressing this is an important step in ensuring the continued success of *GTA* as well as our Teach Westminster pilot scheme, which I (and I am sure many others) would like to see flourish.*

Challenging but at the same time an extremely valuable experience. It allowed me to improve my communication skills massively as well as organising my time productively and discovering new interests.

Young Volunteer

I had an amazing experience! The work we did before we started tutoring was highly informative and helpful and I definitely applied those same concepts in my lessons (and will moving forward). The software used for the actual lessons could be improved as it would give a more lesson-like feeling if both the tutor and the students could see one another AND the whiteboard. Other than that, it was fantastic!

Young Volunteer

My experience as part of this project was very exciting, as it was my first time volunteering. At first, I was a bit nervous but when I got to know my students I felt much more confident. The only issue was that I couldn't share my screen so I had to screenshot the worksheets and upload to [the virtual classroom] which I found inconvenient.

Young Volunteer

I really enjoyed this experience, seeing that it was a massive opportunity for me to understand what it's like to be a tutor and to get some experience working online, which was a pleasant challenge! I did find myself quite frustrated with my own preparations, but it was a really wonderful experience being able to be of some use to children coming up in the future and helping them navigate their passage in their subjects for the little time we had. Either way, massive appreciation to Joss and everyone else who helped organise this - I'm grateful.

Young Volunteer

I found the overall experience to be quite enjoyable. The admin work before getting started was mildly challenging and felt longwinded, but it was worth it at the end. Sometimes I felt as though we had to attend certain meetings which were not very productive; I think making meetings more concise would have made the process more efficient.

I really enjoyed tutoring my tutee and appreciate the independence we were given with teaching content, style, etc. However, perhaps in the future, some guidelines could be given, suggesting ideas for subject related content. I also found the online teaching application to be very effective. I like the fact that free DBS checks were provided for us, and Joss, our manager and adviser from Tutorfair Foundation, was really patient and helpful at all times. All in all, a really interesting process.

Young Volunteer

Tutor Feedback

Upon completing their final tutoring sessions, participating volunteers were invited to complete a short questionnaire to help us understand their experience. This involved ranking their experience out of 5 in response to a series of statements about different aspects of the programme.

Tutors' Average Overall Experience

4.6 / 5

Across the board we received very positive feedback, with almost every category receiving a mix of 5s and 4s only. Overall, the volunteers ranked their experience as 4.6 out of 5 which is within the range (4.5-4.7) that we would normally expect to see from tutors taking part in our programmes. The volunteers' responses to other statements are included below.

Statement	Average Response
I understand what to do in the event of a Safeguarding concern	4.9
The students engaged well with the lessons	4.7
I had enough opportunity to input into the programme	4.7
The Tutorfair team was responsive throughout the programme	4.7
The Tutorfair team was helpful throughout the programme	4.7
I enjoyed the experience	4.7
I have learned new skills as a result of the programme	4.7
My student(s) showed academic progress	4.4
The sessions were well organised	4.4
The training was informative	4.3
The online classroom technology worked well all of the time	4.3
The students gained confidence through the programme	4.3
I was given enough support by Tutorfair	4.3
The training was helpful for delivering lessons	4.1

Room to Improve

Although the feedback provided by tutors was overwhelmingly positive, some key areas of improvement did emerge. Specifically, tutors responded less positively to "training was helpful for delivering lessons," "I was given enough support by Tutorfair" and "training was informative" but responded very positively to "I understand what to do in the event of a Safeguarding concern." This is consistent with the feedback we've received that they felt their training focused too much on Safeguarding and they would have liked the 'tutoring' elements to be more substantial. This is covered in more detail later in this report.

Student Feedback

Like tutors, students were asked to complete a short questionnaire after their final lesson. Only 4 of 7 students completed their questionnaire, but the feedback that was provided was very positive. Overall, students gave their experience an average score of 4.5 out of 5.

Students' Average Overall Experience

4.5 / 5

As we would expect to see, all students felt that their tutor was “friendly, patient and kind.” We were also pleased to see that students were generally happy with the technology in place for the online lessons. Overall, student responses give a clear indication that they enjoyed the tutoring and felt more confident as a result. Average responses to all statements are included below.

Statement	Average Response
My tutor was friendly, patient and kind	5.0
The technology worked well all of the time	4.8
I have enjoyed the tutoring	4.5
After tutoring, I feel that I understand some topics much better	4.5
I feel like I have learned new things because of my tutor	4.5
After tutoring, I feel more confident about going back to school in September	4.5
After tutoring I feel more confident about the subject	4.3
I would like to continue tutoring when I go back to school	3.8

About the Students

Students were recruited for this programme from a number of sources: Westminster Befriend a Family, Westminster City School and Upward Bound UK (an education programme based in neighbouring Islington.) The majority (4 out of 7) students were referred to the programme by Westminster Befriend a Family, 1 student was referred by Westminster City School and the remaining 2 were referred by Upward Bound UK. All students live and/or attend school in Westminster.

The initial plan for the programme had been to include on Key Stage 3 students in the programme. However, 2 students were referred at an early stage who were slightly younger – having just finished Year 6. The transition from year 6 to Year 7 is a difficult time in the best of circumstances, and these students have suffered enormous disruption due to COVID-19 restrictions, so we made the decision to include them. The rest of the students had all just finished either Year 8 or 9.

All students were from disadvantaged (Pupil Premium) backgrounds but represented a range of academic confidence and attainment. Some of the students were very high-achieving relative to their peer group, whilst others struggled to employ the skills expected of their age group. Tutorfair Foundation spoke with each student’s parent or guardian before tutoring began and tailored advice was given to tutors in order to manage expectations and aid preparation for lessons.

Key Learning

Tutoring was effective and very well received

Crucially, this pilot proved beyond doubt that Key Stage 3 students would respond well to tutoring from younger volunteers. Feedback from students and parents alike was very positive – even where students had struggled to get on with tutors in the past. Across the board, students felt that just a small number of sessions had boosted their confidence and improved key skills. Further evaluation is needed to assess the medium- and long-term impact on their academic performance.

Young volunteers struggled with administrative tasks

Whilst the tutors rose to the challenge of planning and preparing for lessons, as a group they struggled to complete the administrative tasks required for their involvement. This included obtaining parental permission, completing a DBS check and confirming their availability. Tasks that would typically take undergraduate/postgraduate tutors around 3 days to complete took closer to 3 weeks for many young volunteers to complete, which led to a delayed start to the programme. Feedback suggests that they struggled with the tasks that couldn't be completed at the time that they were given their instructions. They were less able to plan to complete a multi-stage task such as a DBS check as this requires *first* collecting some documentation and *then* completing a form – a process which might take 20-30 minutes over two days.

Young volunteers wanted shorter training sessions and more 'tutoring' training

Feedback from young volunteers suggests that they found the long (two hour) training session very difficult to engage with. They felt that the training focused on teaching them to be 'ethical, safe tutors' but didn't offer enough in the way of practical teaching and tutoring tips. This is illuminating, as tutoring tips were covered in the second half of the main training session, which suggests many volunteers had grown tired by that point and were no longer taking in the information and advice. Tutors also felt that more 'subject-specific' training was required to support (in particular) English tutors who struggled to apply some of the principles explained in terms of maths and Science tutoring.

Communication was challenging and meetings were not a popular option

Throughout the pilot, communicating effectively with the young volunteers was more challenging than expected. There were several contributing factors to this, including:

- Younger volunteers are less likely to check their email regularly
- The preparation/administrative phase of the pilot coincided with volunteers finishing school for the year
- Younger volunteers are less likely to maintain a clear picture of their availability/commitments over a long period

Tutorfair Foundation tried several methods of communication throughout the pilot and found some more effective than others. For example, texting and/or calling volunteers was far more effective than emailing them. It was also clear that organising meetings to provide support was ineffective as they were very poorly attended once the programme was underway.

Recommendations

Based on student, parent and tutor feedback as well as our own observations, six recommendations for future iterations of this project have surfaced. They are organised here into 3 categories:

Training

Training sessions should be shorter – not more than 1 hour long. Young volunteers struggled with longer training sessions (often squeezed into an already busy school day) and didn't absorb key information delivered after the first hour of training.

Subject-specific tutor training should be offered. This will be particularly useful for English tutors if broader 'tutoring principles' are often explained in terms of Science or maths tutoring. Previous participants in the programme should be involved in this stage of training if possible.

Training should be delivered face-to-face if possible. Feedback suggests that engagement and comprehension in training is more of a challenge than convenience and availability for volunteers at this age. Organising face-to-face training sessions should provide a more engaging experience and lend more urgency and gravity to follow-up tasks. If sessions are organised face-to-face, more than one session could be delivered in the same day as long as sufficient breaks are provided.

Administration

3 weeks should be allowed for volunteers to complete their essential administration tasks. This includes parental permission, DBS check and availability confirmation. Ideally, this should be arranged not to overlap with major events in students' lives such as exams or end-of-year celebrations. Volunteers would like to be given a clear list of their administrative tasks at the very start of the programme – even before they are required to complete any of them.

Young volunteers should complete a short application task in order to participate in the programme. This asks them to explain why they would like to be involved and what they hope to gain from the experience. For this pilot, several young volunteers were swept along by virtue of already being a member of *Global Teaching Alliance* but didn't demonstrate a particular interest in getting involved with the tutoring and failed to complete any of the administrative tasks. This meant the initial number of "interested volunteers" was inflated which led to some delays.

Communication

Programme organisers should maintain a text or Whatsapp group with participating volunteers. This will be a more effective method of communicating with volunteers than via email and allow for more direct and effective support. This will also encourage a 'team spirit' and connect individual participants to the successes, struggles and progress of their peers. Appropriate permissions should be sought before setting up the group.