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Fleet Tutors

1. Who are they?

Fleet Tutors

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2. Staff

Mylène Curtis is the owner and managing director. Stylish, half-American, terrifically elegant, focused and pulsatingly dynamic, she bought Fleet three years ago and has so successfully injected it with energy, drive and ambition that it is now the only national agency in the UK. (In 2006, she bought Anysubject Ltd – previously, the only other national agency.) Mylène has an ‘entrepreneurial background, running professional services that operate in a wide geographic area with a goal of providing a consistent, high quality service’. She regularly appears in newspapers as ‘the’ spokesperson for this huge industry. ‘Quality’ is a word she uses a lot and one has to be impressed by Fleet’s scale and slickness. New slick office in Chiswick, west London, in 2007, testament to growth in business.. She now employs 32 members of staff, between the offices in Hampshire and London, with a midlands/northern manager based in Lincolnshire. Also an academic co-ordinator responsible for the quality and training of tutors, a development manager who works with LEAs and schools, as well as accounting and administrative staff. Much the biggest team, then, in the business and one that has more than doubled in size in a year.

3. What do they offer?

Around 80 subjects – yes, 80. However, as everywhere, most demand is for maths, English and the sciences and mostly at pre-GCSE level. Fastest growing area? – primary, especially year 6. (If English at this level is your main concern, you should look at *11+ English: A Parent’s Toolkit*, available from *The Good Schools Guide* www.11plusenglish.com – if you haven’t got it already!) They can find tutors for every level including every school stage to post-grad for some subjects. They have tutors with experience and qualifications in various SpLDs and, basically, if they don’t teach it you can’t possibly want to learn it! All pupils have individual education plans – copies kept by clients, teachers and pupils and this serves as a target and achievement record – useful to all.

They are a national company and, of the agencies who offer more than just a database, they are the only one which has a spread of tutors over the country. The acquisition of Anysubject greatly increased their coverage of the country and they now confidently claim to be able to supply tutors in most subjects anywhere in the country. In that respect, they are unique and no other company comes near. They are also now developing online learning either instead of face-to-face or as a complement to it – well worth exploring if you are on a moor or in a glen or one of the few other places a Fleet tutor cannot climb, swim or abseil to. .

They have 510 tutors in London. They cover all the Home Counties and are especially busy in areas with grammar schools – no prizes for why! Tutors visits pupils’ homes

unless they are brought in by schools and work there. Fleet supplies teachers for individual help to a number of schools, eg Wellington, Frensham Heights and Queen Anne's, Caversham. They also offer top-up courses (in London) over the summer holidays and home-based summer camps. This means that tutors in sports, arts, drama and music come to you!

4. Background and basics

Fleet has been established for 30 years but has been propelled into the 21st century by Mylène Curtis. They have offices in quiet, residential Church Crookham, on the edge of Fleet in Hampshire which is on the edge of Aldershot – all outwardly very unassuming and it's a surprise to enter the office, watch the staff answering the constant flow of calls and realise that this is one of a kind as far as tutor agencies go. They have 3,000 tutors currently on the books and 200 or so applicants are interviewed each month. Around 600 tutors have had long relationships with Fleet and are kept well-supplied with assignments. Whereas the average age of Fleet's tutors is 40, most are retired teachers. Some are younger but have fallen out of love with the system, some are postgrads and others are, as we have met elsewhere, highly-educated younger people who mix some tutoring with, eg acting. A few are retired professionals from careers in eg science, engineering, etc who enjoy the work.

Of the 200 or so monthly applicants around one third are selected. Applicants need a teaching certificate and/or degree in the main subject they offer. Unlike other agencies, Fleet insists that all tutors have a degree in the subject they are offering – other agencies consider an A level to be sufficient and we don't agree – except at primary or perhaps the earliest years of secondary levels. All tutors go through enhanced CRB clearance, must present copies of their qualifications and references – all of which are pursued. All applicants are interviewed – usually by phone – and the interview process is rigorous. 'We do not hire tutors who want "stop-gap-employment" – we're a hands-on service, not just an agency'.

Tutors are offered regular training opportunities and are kept in touch via regular newsletters which keep them up-to-date with curriculum developments, policy changes, etc – this a seriously useful thing for those who can't keep up with every latest notion in the DES's noddle. Likewise Fleet is assiduous in seeking feedback – more so than any other agency we know. They call after the first session to see how it went. They send formal feedback forms which ask really sensible questions about the tutor, the tutoring and the whole works. They follow up tuition four to six times a year and take all comments seriously. 'We spend a lot of time on the phone – not just in the set-up period but during the tuition.' We read through a vast ringbinder of comments and it was hard to spot anything less enthusiastic than "good" in answer to any question. Tutors are appraised regularly and, 'if tutors do not receive consistently high ratings... they are removed from our books'.

5. Money and small print

All tutors work on a self-employed basis. The clients are invoiced monthly and the tutors are paid likewise by the agency. Clients pay a registration fee of £47–64 depending on location and tuition required. This is payable as soon as Fleet has ascertained that they can provide what is needed and clients can have a second or third shot at settling down with a tutor if number one doesn't suit. It does, however, in 75 per cent of cases, we are told. However, there can be problems with this fee if, in between registering and them ringing you back with suggested tutors, you find one elsewhere. Better check this out before agreeing if you are looking elsewhere. Tutors sign a contract with the agency.

Average fee for lessons is £30. However, it varies between £25–£41 depending on what you want and where. Discounts for multiple lessons booked at once. And the first lesson is free – to see how it works. We like this. (Though you can't keep on getting free ones if you don't like the first tutor!)

6. They say

'Our values and philosophy apply to our clients, tutors and staff. It's not about hot-housing but building confidence and relieving anxiety about exams. I found it amazing that there was no national company with a national brand which delivered a consistent service that was value for money. We have the systems, the processes and the procedures while maintaining the personalisation of a local company. We are the largest but it's not about building numbers – every single client counts.' Quality. Quality and, er, quality.

7. Remarks

Tutors clearly like the set-up. 'They give me loads of work... I've never had a problem.' 'They're fair, honest, efficient – sort any problems immediately... they're fantastic to work for.' And clients are similarly satisfied, 'They found me a good tutor who exactly met my needs. She helped me amazingly... I would never have got to college without her' – and so on! Wellington College says they, 'have used Fleet Tutors for a number of boys over the past four years... have been impressed by the quality of the tutors and the way in which they take an individual interest in the pupils they are working with'. Reliable, slick, excellent. This is Amazon – you get the quality, the delivery and all done in the mass market but direct to your door and at a discount. Of the big operators, it's the one to beat.