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Indian tutors to offer online help for GCSE students

By Richard Garner

A new army of personal tutors for pupils taking GCSEs will start work today, giving tips on how to pass exams - from their homes in India.

Gordon Brown held out the vision of a personal tutor for every state school child - tracking their progress throughout the school day - in his speech to the Labour Party conference on Monday. However, if they want help revising for their exams, the chances are they will be in touch with one of 500 specialist tutors recruited in India under a new online revision programme launched this morning by Letts Educational, the "gurus" of exam revision in the UK whose books help 1.5 million young people with their studies every year.

Where banks and computer network support companies have led the way in using Indian-based call centres, the British exams industry is now following.

One of the reasons for the Indian connection is that Letts has gone into partnership with the Bangalore-based firm, to provide the service - initially in maths and science.

However, both companies stress that all the staff recruited in India have specialist degrees in their subject areas and teaching qualifications. Many students in India now sit the iGCSE - the international version of the exam now favoured by many independent schools and more like O-levels because of an absence of coursework.

Andrew Ware, managing director of Letts Educational, said: "We did a lot of research launching the operation and 80 per cent of the requests we were receiving were for maths so that seemed the right place for us to start. We also believe that the new package will make tutoring available to a range of parents who could not afford it beforehand."

The package costs £49.99p for a month's tuition. Tutors work shifts giving 24-hour coverage.

Other subjects are likely to go online at the start of the next school year and the service could be extended to cover the 11-plus at the country's 164 remaining state grammar schools and the common entrance exam independent schools use to select their pupils.

One thing is certain, though, the tutors will not have to talk about the weather in the UK to gain the confidence of their clients as has happened with other Indian call centres -

unless, of course, the geography syllabus goes online and the revision under discussion is about climate change.

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