

# Elocution in the new Britain

Trends in private tuition  
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# 1 Introduction

Welcome to the first of a series of annual reports looking at the latest trends in the private tuition sector, produced by the UK's leading tuition website, [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com). In this and future reports, our intention is to provide a commentary on the rapidly developing, and ever-changing world of tutoring which, thanks to the internet and rising demand for one-to-one teaching and coaching, has become one of the fastest growing sectors in the education market-place.

This growth continues despite uncertainty about the economy following the most prolonged recession since the 1930s. Even before the economic downturn, almost one in four children in England and Wales were reported to have received private tuition at some stage during their schooling. This first report, based on over 20,000 enquiries received by [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com) in 2011, shows the huge variety of subjects taught by private tutors, ranging from help in preparing children for English and maths tests to lessons in saxophone and Chinese.

The growth in demand for private tuition and coaching is perhaps greater still among adults. Worries about the current state of the jobs market and the desire to boost career prospects seem to be encouraging more and more undergraduates and young professionals to seek additional coaching to help them achieve their career goals.

For this first report, we are highlighting a group of subjects where demand is currently outstripping supply. That doesn't mean they are the most popular subjects but that tutors who coach them receive more enquiries for help on average than any others. Significantly, nine out of the top ten of these 'trending' subjects are vocational or connected with career aspirations in some way: they include accounting, finance, marketing, architecture and law. But it is the rise in demand for elocution and speech lessons that is perhaps most remarkable, and it is this trend which forms the main focus of our report.

The increased appeal of elocution training seems to be a reflection of deep-seated changes that are taking place in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain. This report examines that trend in depth, and interviews some of the new breed of elocution teachers who are very different from the traditional image portrayed in Shaw's *Pygmalion* or the recent film, *The King's Speech*.

Finally, the report presents robust data which reveals the most popular subjects for private tuition across all disciplines: in academic subjects, languages and musical instruments. So there's something in this report to interest everyone.

**Henry Fagg,**  
Director, [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com)

## 2 Why more and more Britons are turning to elocution tutors to learn ‘the Queen’s English’

A combination of economic and social pressures, personal and parental anxiety, the development of new media and cultural change associated with recent immigration from European and other countries appears to be having a profound effect on the way Britons in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century perceive and wish to present themselves. Suddenly, after decades in the cold and being dismissed as a subject for snobs and linguistic obsessives, elocution lessons are in hot demand once again.

An analysis of 20,614 enquiries from people seeking private teaching or coaching in 2011, sent through the UK’s leading private tuition portal [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com), shows that *elocution lessons elicited more enquiries per available tutor than any other subject*. It appears that rising demand for elocution - or speech - coaching is causing a national shortage of voice teachers and many people seeking help are being turned away.

Hundreds of elocution enquiries received by the website last year reveal a mixture of reasons why people are turning to elocution teachers for help. Most commonly cited reasons include a lack of confidence in one’s voice, fear of public speaking and dissatisfaction with accents. People living in the West Midlands, Northern England, the West Country, London and Essex lead the list of those most unhappy with the sound of their own voice.

Many people seeking lessons are business managers and professionals and include company directors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, university lecturers, barristers, solicitors, NHS managers and even ministers of religion. Others include people working in, or hoping to find a career in, the broadcast media, including the BBC and new media.

### Most people seeking help want to ‘soften’ or lose their regional accent

The most common requests for help include a desire to lose or ‘soften’ local or regional accents, with by far the biggest number of appeals coming from people in Birmingham and other parts of the West Midlands. Many fear they are being discriminated against in the jobs market-place or held back in their careers because of their accents or because they struggle to speak clearly.

Four factors appear to be driving this demand for elocution training. First is the depressed state of the jobs market which is putting an increased premium on coaching. Growing numbers of students and graduates are seeking support to help them find employment in the chosen careers. Established professionals eager to move up the career ladder are also turning to elocution teachers and voice coaches to improve diction, and develop their interview and presentation skills.

The growth of new media, multi-channel digital TV and radio, and the increased importance of music and entertainment in British cultural life, is another factor that seems to be making the

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need for clear diction and a confident, well-paced ‘broadcasting voice’ an essential tool of the trade. For many young people, a career in the media or entertainment industry is their number one priority. These TV, radio and YouTube ‘wannabes’ who are turning in increasing numbers to voice coaches for help, include presenters, video journalists, members of pop groups and young people hoping to become news readers. Others include aspirant actors and singers seeking to improve their diction and voice control.

A third factor behind the new fashion for elocution teaching is the return to more traditional teaching methods in schools. All pupils are now expected to learn to read using phonics, which explores the relationship between words and spoken sounds. In many primary schools this has been accompanied with an increased emphasis on speaking and listening and some schools are even turning to elocution tutors to support their pupils’ language development. The return of phonics has encouraged an increasing number of parents to employ elocution tutors to help their children’s reading and to achieve well in their SATs tests. Other parents are employing elocution teachers to help their children prepare for GCSE presentations and university interviews.

### A striking number of overseas professionals want to acquire ‘posh’ English accents

The fourth factor driving enquiries for elocution lessons is the large number of people who have come to the UK from European and other countries over the past decade looking to study and to work. Many are well-educated, highly motivated individuals working in business, the City of London, the NHS and other professions who are seeking to improve their English and their communication skills. Typically they are looking to soften their accents and a strikingly common plea is to be able to speak impeccable English, as spoken by the actress Joanna Lumley, or “perfect private school (posh)”.

Together, these four factors show that a New Britain is emerging: more voice-conscious, more media-savvy, more ambitious in these economically uncertain times and more cosmopolitan than ever before. Today’s elocution teachers are responding to these trends not by seeking to take their students back to the days of *The King’s Speech*. Most people who come to them for help no longer wish to acquire a cut-glass accent or learn to speak like the Queen. On the whole they wish to retain their accents but to develop a clearer, softer, or more authoritative voice. As the BBC and other broadcasters have shown, having embraced presenters and newsreaders with regional accents, it is OK to speak with a Brummie accent and also to speak ‘received pronunciation’, or RP.

## Top 10 ‘trending’ subjects

*(subjects with the highest number of enquiries per tutor in 2011)*

- 1 Elocution
- 2 University-level Statistics
- 3 Accounting
- 4 Harp
- 5 AutoCAD
- 6 Chinese
- 7 Architecture
- 8 Finance
- 9 Marketing
- 10 Law

Source: [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com)

# 3 Enquiries from people seeking elocution lessons in 2011: selected quotations

The quotations below are among the hundreds of enquiries received by [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com) from people seeking help in 2011. Some minor details have been removed to respect privacy.

## People seeking to reduce their accents or improve their voice

“I work at a prominent Midlands factory and as my career is progressing I find myself having to give more presentations and hold conference calls and meetings with members of senior management. **I have a strong Brummie accent and often the first impression people have of me when they hear me talk is that I am ‘thick’.** One person even said I sounded like a thug when I spoke! This does affect my self-confidence when giving presentations. I want to improve my elocution, tone down my Brummie accent, as I think it may hold me back in my career.”

“**I am a Dudley girl born and bred and sadly I sound like one too.** I will shortly find myself on the open job market and feel this can only disadvantage me in my forthcoming search for employment. I also think that I could earn more if I sounded better. I would love to speak clearly, slowly and without my Black Country accent.”

“My daughter and her partner would like to have elocution lessons. She has a degree and her partner is an accountant and **they feel that their Essex accent holds them back from achieving successful posts and career opportunities.**”

“I am looking to start elocution lessons to try to lose **my Mancunian accent.** I run my own company and have recently moved to the South East from the North. I want to perfect my speaking so that I am better understood both locally and internationally.”

“**I am a barrister and have a very broad South East London accent** that I am proud of, but which may be affecting my career prospects. Recently I had a shock when I discovered a promotion I had attained was almost not given to me because of my accent. I am beginning to get tired of the reaction I get when I open my mouth and although proud of my roots I am wondering if I should have some elocution lessons in order that I am taken more seriously.”

“Four years ago, I joined the Territorial Army and went on to get a TA commission at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. In my final report they made reference to my ability to communicate with others and suggested I seek help to improve my communication skills. **I hope to go back to Sandhurst next year and was hoping to improve my communication** before doing so.”

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"I'm a manager within the NHS and have a very quiet, softly spoken voice which doesn't carry very well and often conveys the impression that I am younger and more timid than I am. I am keen to get on in my career and need some elocution lessons in order to speak more clearly and at a much higher volume."

"My daughter is a 19-year-old university student. When she holds a conversation with her friends she says she feels embarrassed as she has a very strong Birmingham accent and, in her own words: **They all speak so posh. I was wondering if you could help?**"

"I have a strong Black Country accent that I am very proud of, but I feel ignored as often there is a thought that I am dim. I am a social worker and need to be able to speak in Court (I dread going) and on other appointments. I feel that there is going to be more of this in the future."

"I live in Walsall so have a slight combination of Brummie to very broad Black Country. I really do not like the accent. I run my own business so have dealings with people from outside the West Midlands and I feel the accent holds me back from voicing my opinion quite a lot. Please help."

"I would like to enquire about your elocution tutoring. I often cringe when I hear myself speaking and whilst I do try to correct myself now and again it doesn't come naturally. If I am cringing, what are my clients thinking when they hear me? I would love some help, but you will have your work cut out: I drop letters right, left and centre!"

"I am looking at softening/removal of my Wolverhampton accent, which I hate. It is something that I have wished to attempt for many years and, having observed the new voices of Liza Tar-buck and more recently, Cat Deeley, I know it's achievable."

## People in the media and entertainment

"I sing in a band and we are regularly interviewed on TV and radio. I have been told since childhood that my speaking voice is very unclear, and also too fast. After listening back to my recorded interviews, I would like to improve the clarity of my speech, as well as the tone of voice."

"I am currently studying broadcasting journalism at university. The course entails speaking on the radio and television. I have the qualities of a presenter in regards to charm and wit. However, I speak far too fast and can often mumble. I'm wondering if you can aid my predicament?"

"I am interested in receiving elocution lessons. My aim is to go into journalism and there is an amazing BBC trainee scheme I wish to apply to in the autumn. They are looking for 'broadcasting voices': clear, authoritative and well-paced. How might you be able to help me?"

"I am a video journalist which means I have to present on camera and do a lot of voice-overs. I have a project coming up that I will have to be extra careful with my pronunciation and diction. I was wondering could you help me?"

"I wanted to get in touch with you because I want to become a newsreader/presenter when I'm older and I needed help with my speech. I want to be able to speak properly."

## Parents seeking help for their children

**“I live in Cheshire and my son has developed an irritating Scouse accent** over the past few months. I am constantly correcting his pronunciation but it’s just not working. It is important that he speaks well and I feel now is the time to get him on the correct path.”

“My enquiry is regarding elocution lessons for my daughter. Currently she is attending private school. **I would like her to speak the Queen’s English and sound like she has a private education.** Please advise.”

**“My daughter has recently changed from private school to state school and I’ve noticed a huge change in her speech, which is HORRIFYING!** Sadly, I’m on a low income, but am keen to correct this before it becomes the norm.”

“I am enquiring about elocution lessons for my 16-year-old granddaughter. She had hearing difficulties in early childhood and did not speak properly until she was eight. **She says other people say she speaks badly and is feeling embarrassed at college.**”

**“My daughter is a year 10 student and has been struggling with her confidence when public speaking.** She needs someone to teach her techniques so that she does not let her nerves affect her performance. She has confidence when talking in small group conversations but finds it hard when presenting to her peers at school and it has got progressively worse over the years. She is not looking for a therapist but someone who can help her to be confident when speaking in front of a formal audience to prepare her for her up and coming GCSEs.”

## People from overseas looking to improve their diction

**“I work in the City and am looking for promotion** but feel that my language skills are holding me back. I am from South East Asia and speak Mandarin and English. I’d like to improve on the clarity and tone of my speech, soften my accent (not remove it as I’m proud of my origins), be able to handle City-type potentially confrontational dialogues: win-win, etc.”

“I’m a Polish national educated in Cambridge, living in the East of England and working as a company director. I would like to work on my accent to be able to speak a **perfect private school (posh) English** and was interested in taking lessons.”

“I have been living in the UK for 14 years. **I am Polish and I am still unable to lose my accent.** I hope that elocution lessons will help to soften my accent and perhaps completely leave it behind. My aim is to blend with others in the way I speak.”

“I always wanted to take some elocution lessons to have a ‘posh’ accent and also learn to be a good speaker. **I love the way Joanna Lumley speaks and I’m sure you can help me to achieve that.** I was born in Russia and have lived in the UK for only five years. I have moved into a senior position in my current job and would like to improve my communication skills.”



# 4 Meet the new Henry Higgineses: the elocution tutors helping people to find their voice

## Four case studies:

### **JAMES GREGORY: 'I do have people very unhappy with their West Midlands accent who want to lose it completely'**

**James 30, teaches singing, speech and elocution and vocal coaching. He is based in Balsall Heath in the West Midlands.**

"I have been a singing teacher for many years. I started to do a lot of work in schools not just as a singing teacher but in articulation, phonics and correct pronunciation. In the last six to seven years there have been lots of developments in government requirements to teach phonics in primary schools. Most of the work I do now though is with adults who want to improve their speaking skills.

"Most of the people who come and work with me do so because they are unhappy with the way they sound and have quite a negative perception of their own voice. A lot of the work I do is in accent reduction and mostly it's the local West Midlands accent that they are seeking to lose.

"There are lots of pressures on people now to try to improve all aspects of themselves when they go out into the world of work. Everyone is fighting for jobs and positions and employers have the upper hand in that they can pick and choose. A lot of the people I work with want to develop skills in presentation and communication as well as speech and articulation. It's about how they put themselves across and whether they can make a clear point.

"I have more and more business people coming to me looking for help with presentation skills. Many people also come for help with reducing their accents or because they have functional speech difficulties. I do have people who are very unhappy with their accent who would like very much to lose it completely. That's fine if that's what they want. But just because you're developing better speech, presentation and communication skills to use when you need them doesn't mean it stays with you all the time. It's like a hat you can put on when you need it.

"Elocution is becoming more popular. People no longer see it as about losing their personality or their identity. They simply want to learn to improve their voice."

## PAULINE MIDWINTER: ‘People come to me because they want to be understood, not to learn to speak like the Queen’

**Pauline is a part-time teacher based in Ashford, Kent. She offers elocution lessons as well as tuition in English and drama and 11-plus preparation.**

“I’ve been a drama teacher for 10 years and when I was at college I studied voice production as part of my performing arts degree. When I started teaching elocution three years ago there were hardly any people doing it.

“I have definitely noticed an increase in enquiries. In the past year there has been a peak of interest. At one point I was refusing four enquiries per week because I can’t fit everybody in. A lot of people who contact me have moved from other countries to Britain and find it difficult to make themselves understood because their accents are too strong or their English isn’t strong enough.

“I also help people with speech preparation for important occasions. I helped a man recently prepare for his wedding speech, a businessman with a couple of presentations, and a business-woman who speaks too fast and wanted help with slowing her speech down.

“People come for help for a variety of reasons. In Kent, where I live, a lot of people come in from abroad to work and are looking to soften their accents so they can be better understood. This year (2012), the local college has employed me to teach an evening course in accent reduction in Tonbridge, Dover and Folkestone.

“I think as long as people speak clearly, if they have an accent that’s OK, as long as they can be understood. There are times when a voice with less of an accent might be an advantage, for example at an interview, or if you are speaking to a large group of people when it helps to have a voice that is loud and clear and can be understood by everybody. Most people have very specific needs that they want to correct. Very few come to me and say, ‘I want to speak like the Queen’. They just want to be understood.”

## SUSAN NATALY COOMBES: ‘Speech is becoming slipshod because of the influence of text messaging and the internet’

**Susan is an operatic and concert soprano who also teaches elocution and public speaking. She teaches in central London, Hertfordshire and online.**

“I do a lot of teaching in the City of London and get a lot of demand from people working in investment banks and city institutions.

“Elocution, or voice coaching, is becoming increasingly popular with business people who need to speak clearly for meetings, presentations and video conferences. People call me for help

making speeches for weddings. I get calls from parents who say their children are not speaking well and also increasingly from people for whom English is not their first language who feel they need help with their accent.

“I personally feel that people’s speech is becoming very slipshod, due to texting and spending huge numbers of hours on the internet. People don’t have the patience to pronounce a word properly any more.

“I think people should think carefully about how they present themselves verbally, whether they are appearing in public, making a presentation or at an interview. Elocution coaching can definitely make a difference.

“You can’t change a person’s voice or accent overnight but with a little bit of thought and working at the techniques that I give them it can certainly make a marked improvement – and it’s something they can keep for life.”

## **MAGGIE HALL: ‘Many feel their voice is holding them back and come to me for help. I blame *The King’s Speech!*’**

**Maggie is a speech and drama teacher based in Brighton. She prepares students for speech and drama exams and coaches in public speaking, presentation and interview skills and elocution.**

“I went into teaching speech and drama because of my background in drama but the speech side took off rather more than I expected it to.

“I am currently training nine people and only three are doing drama. I’ve got a young man of 15 who is preparing for entry to military college. His Mum’s brought him along to help him to speak more clearly and confidently. I’ve got an Israeli lady who is trying to reduce her rather strong Israeli accent and another who is trying to reduce her Portsmouth accent. I’ve also got a hospital manager who is working to improve her Estuarine accent.

“I only attempt to help people change or reduce an accent if that’s what they want to do. Some people are very self-conscious about the way they speak and feel their accent holds them back. If that’s their perception they need to do something about it.

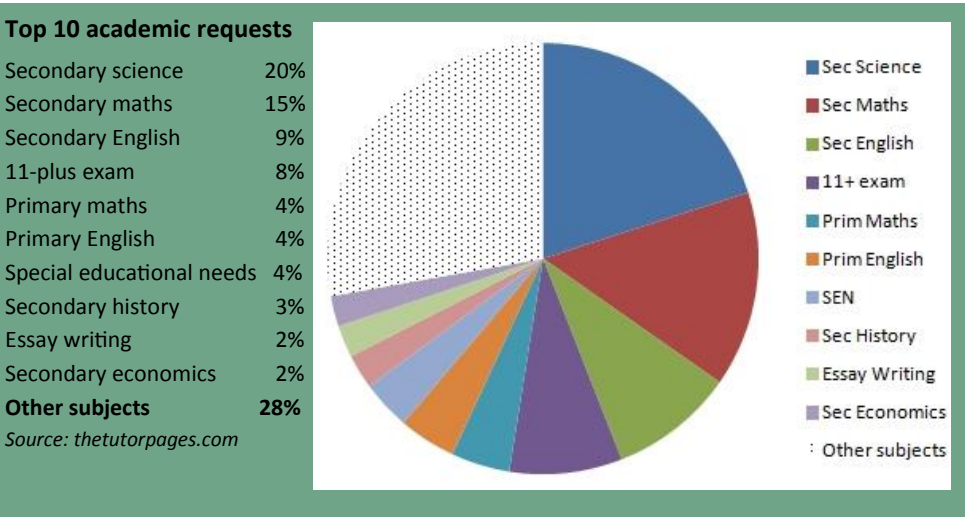
“Recently I have noticed a marked increase in requests for elocution. Personally, I blame *The King’s Speech*. I think perhaps it has made people think that if such a severe speech problem as that could be overcome then perhaps they should have a go at improving their own speech. Mind you, the speech impediment that the King had I wouldn’t deal with. I would refer someone like that to a proper speech and language therapist.

“Nobody really wants to speak like the Queen, or her father as played by Colin Firth in the film. Received pronunciation isn’t what it used to be. There are very few people who speak with that really clipped English accent that you can see in films like *Brief Encounter* nowadays. The people to listen to for an example of really good received pronunciation are actors like Ben Kingsley, Patrick Stewart and Judy Dench. “

# 5 Other trends in tutoring

## Requests for tuition in academic subjects

While this report focuses on the growing demand for elocution teaching, traditional academic subjects attracted most enquiries from people seeking one-to-one tuition in 2011. The greatest number of requests came from parents seeking additional help for their children preparing for school tests or external exams. Demand for extra tuition was greatest in secondary science subjects, attracting 20 per cent of academic subject enquiries, followed by secondary maths (15 per cent). The third largest number of enquiries was for secondary English (9 per cent) followed by extra support for pupils preparing for 11-plus exams (8 per cent). Other subjects attracting large numbers of enquiries were primary maths and English and special needs. *See graphic below.*



## Language tuition requests

The subject attracting easily the most enquiries to [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com) from people seeking tuition in 2011 was English as a Foreign Language, with 22 per cent of the total. French and Spanish came next with 19 per cent of enquiries each, making them easily the most popular European languages after English. Another significant trend is the growing number of requests from people seeking to learn Chinese (Mandarin). The subject is currently running neck-and-neck with German, something that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. Other popular languages attracting enquiries include Italian (6 per cent) and Russian, Portuguese, Japanese and Modern Greek (2 per cent each). *See graphic on the following page.*

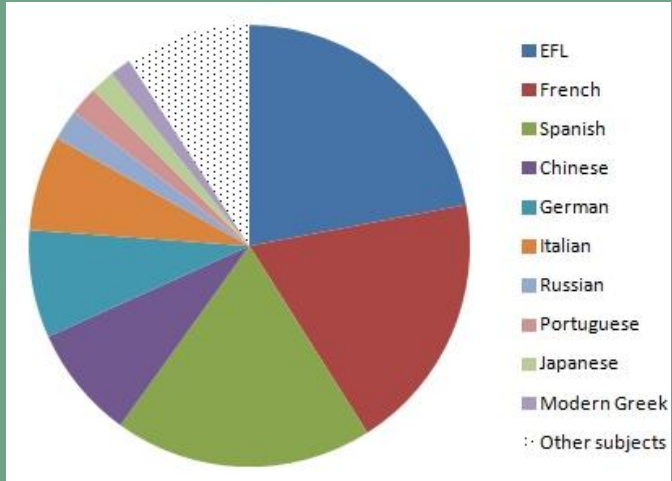
## Musical instrument requests

Over half of all requests for musical tuition were for piano (28 per cent), singing (16 per cent) and the violin (14 per cent). The saxophone was the fourth most popular (6 per cent), perhaps surprisingly since this meant it was ahead of guitar, flute, trumpet and cello. *See graphic below.*

### Top 10 requests

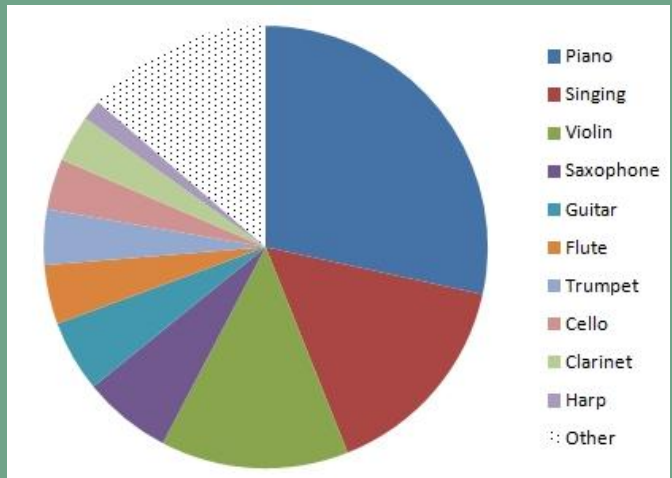
#### Languages

EFL	22%
French	19%
Spanish	19%
Chinese	8%
German	8%
Italian	7%
Russian	2%
Portuguese	2%
Japanese	2%
Modern Greek	2%
<b>Other subjects</b>	<b>9%</b>



#### Music instruments

Piano	28%
Singing	16%
Violin	14%
Saxophone	6%
Guitar	5%
Flute	4%
Trumpet	4%
Cello	4%
Clarinet	3%
Harp	1%
<b>Other</b>	<b>14%</b>



Figures based on 20,614 enquiries to [thetutorpages.com](http://thetutorpages.com) in 2011

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