

# Meet Atom Learning, the largest UK-based edtech platform

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Alex Hatvany and Jake O’Keeffe the cofounders of Atom Learning about bootstrapping their business and democratising online learning to help primary school children from all backgrounds improve their learning and prepare for exams.

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*Atom Learning* is the UK’s largest edtech platform for Key Stage 2 students. Founded in 2018 by *Alex Hatvany* and *Jake O’Keeffe*, the platform helps primary school children between years 3-6 to improve their learning and prepare for secondary school entrance exams, including the 11+, and SATs.

Atom Learning is divided into two core learning models. ‘Atom Nucleus’ provides a high-quality and cost-effective alternative to private tutoring for parents wanting to support their children’s learning at home. ‘Atom Prime’ is free for all schools, as well as pupils on free school meals, and is used in classrooms around the UK to support over 90,000 primary school pupils.

## What was the catalyst for launching

# Atom Learning?

Whilst studying at university, my cofounder, Jake, and I worked as tutors, but we became uncomfortable with how inaccessible tuition was to most ordinary families and how much the quality varies. Having seen first-hand the unregulated and unequal nature of private tuition, we decided to design and launch an alternative way for pupils to get the tailored support they need to enhance their educational outcomes.

## Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

We built a platform to help primary school children from all backgrounds improve their learning and prepare for exams. Our product uses teacher created content and predictive technology to create fun, educational experiences that are tailored to each child's learning style and knowledge level.

Through Atom, pupils complete interactive learning exercises that are never demotivating, but always challenging enough to accelerate progress and build confidence. Both of our Prime and Nucleus platforms use AI to tailor tasks to each child's individual needs. No other online learning platform employs a model like ours.

## How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

Since 2018, Atom Learning has expanded massively and our current team consists of over 100 education and technology professionals from across Europe. We've also accumulated a resource bank containing over 90,000 teacher-written questions and activities, and incorporated more advanced machine learning into our platform that adapts to changes in student's moods and motivation levels. Our latest model has increased student engagement on the platform by more than 30% and attainment improvement rates by more than 40%.

# How are you funded?

For the first 3 years, we chose to bootstrap the business. This allowed us to retain creative control and strengthen our business model, resources and vision before looking to external sources of funding. It wasn't until the end of 2021 that we decided to raise capital from institutional investors and raised \$25M from SoftBank – the largest Series A round ever secured by a UK-based edtech platform.

# What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

During the peak of COVID-19, we experienced an unprecedented increase in demand for our platform as schools and families turned to online learning. As a result, we doubled our team in the space of just 12 months. It was a challenge to onboard so many new staff during the pandemic. We had to quickly upskill on remote recruitment and onboarding.

# How does Atom Learning answer an unmet need?

So many educational outcomes are set in stone before a child even starts secondary school. The quality of support that a pupil receives at primary level can therefore have an outsized impact on their life chances. Atom learning enables every child, no matter their circumstances, to thrive.

No other platform is able to offer such a vast array of support and help, make it free for those who otherwise couldn't afford it, and deliver it through technology which makes the learning completely bespoke.

# What's in store for the future?

We're constantly upgrading and improving our product, making sure we're adding value at every turn. We want to see Atom used in every household and primary school in the UK and beyond.

# What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Consider bootstrapping your business rather than raising investment right away. Biding your time can allow you to take investment on your own terms, and avoid chasing growth metrics at the cost of your company vision. We decided to raise strategic investment only when we were certain that we had established a durable and scalable business model.

Alex Hatvany and Jake O'Keeffe are the cofounders of *Atom Learning*.

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