



Research in Focus

Gathering evidence to inform practice

The Kusuma Trust UK (The Trust) uses evidence from research to inform and influence policy and practice in secondary education in government schools. This issue reports on three studies that illustrate different facets of Kusuma's strategic focus on improving the educational outcomes and life chances of disadvantaged children in Uttar Pradesh and Odisha in India.

Transition from primary to secondary education

In India, many students drop out of education at the point of transition between primary and secondary school. This is a key issue for education policy makers and providers. To address this issue, The Trust funded Pratham¹ to undertake a two-year study on 'Understanding Access to Secondary Education'. The report of this study, which was completed in July 2016, maps all educational provision at primary, secondary, higher and vocational levels in four representative blocks in Hardoi (in Uttar Pradesh) and Sambalpur (in Odisha).

The study tracked a sample of students between the final year of primary school (Class 8) and a year later when students might be expected to be in Class 9 of secondary school. The learning levels of students were assessed at these two points to explore the relationship between educational attainment and progression to secondary education. The report will inform Kusuma's efforts to transform the provision of secondary education in India and will be available on The Trust's website in September 2016².

Promoting teacher professional development

Evidence³ shows that skilled teachers have a crucial role to play in making the difference between educational success and failure, and in raising the attainment of bright students. Accordingly, in-service professional development of teachers in government secondary schools is a key plank in Kusuma's holistic approach to improving student learning outcomes in Science, Maths and English. In 2015, Kusuma funded EduLever, a research agency in India, to undertake a baseline assessment⁴ of the impact of the 'Udbhav' teacher professional development programme on teaching practice and student attainment. An evaluation of the second year of the programme was completed by New Concept Information Systems in June 2016 and a summary of the key findings will be available on The Trust's website in September 2016⁵.

Findings indicate that:

- teachers are more skilled in the use of Q&As to stimulate learning than group work, peer learning or drawing on students' own experiences
- improved teacher performance has a positive impact on student learning levels
- students were appreciative of teachers who used interactive teaching methods but were aware that they 'lag behind' and therefore have difficulty in understanding lessons regardless of the teaching methods used
- access to private tuition has a significant impact on student attainment

'Udbhav has given us hope. There is a gradual increase in the interest of students too'. (Teacher)

'The teacher divided the class into two groups and kept asking questions, like in a quiz'. (Student)



English Teacher Renu Singh during a classroom discussion. Photo Sam Strickland

1. An independent research and advocacy NGO based in India.
2. <http://www.kusumatrust.org/our-work/research/india>
3. <http://www.suttrtrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-makes-great-teaching-FINAL-4.11.14.pdf>
4. <http://www.kusumatrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Udbhav-Baseline-Evaluation.pdf>
5. <http://www.kusumatrust.org/our-work/research/india>

Kusuma Excellence Fellowships

Many bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to realise their academic or professional potential as a result of economic and social disadvantage. To address this problem, the Kusuma Excellence Fellowship (KEF) programme provides high-achieving students from low-income families in Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh and Sambalpur in Odisha with a financial stipend, mentoring and career counselling. The Trust funded the London School of Economics (LSE) to assess the impact of the KEF programme on a sample of fellows and unsuccessful applicants over a 5-year period. Findings from the first year of the evaluation identify emerging trends in student performance, attitudes to education and time spent on academic studies.

Findings indicate that, compared with unsuccessful applicants, fellows:

- spend less time per week on non-academic work e.g. household chores, involvement in agricultural or other work
- are more likely to use private tuition
- achieve similar scores in Grade 11 exams
- expect a higher return from higher education in terms of anticipated income

In future years, the evaluation will explore student performance in Class 12 exams, career choices and income on entry to the labour market.

The Trust has funded nearly 900 fellows in Sambalpur and Hardoi. From October 2016, an additional 200 high performing students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be selected for the Fellowship programme.

Excellence Fellow pursues his ambition

Shashank Bhardwaj is a Kusuma Excellence Fellow studying Class 12 Science at Sanatan Dharm Inter College in Hardoi. Shashank successfully applied for the Kusuma Excellence Fellowship programme as a way to fund his education beyond secondary school. Shashank is the eldest sibling and felt that he should financially help his parents by bearing the cost of higher education on his own. He realised that there was the opportunity to do this after reading about the Kusuma Excellence Fellowship in a local newspaper. He decided to apply and his determination paid off when he was selected for the Fellowship in 2015-2016.

Since obtaining the Fellowship, Shashank's confidence has gone from strength to strength. He has won awards in school competitions including top prizes in essay writing and general knowledge competitions, and has also participated in more extra curricular activities including sports and singing competitions. Shashank acknowledged that this newly found confidence is because of his Fellowship and the belief that his mentors and teachers have instilled in him.

"The Fellowship is perfect for me. I now have much more confidence. My parents could not afford to support me to continue studying but now I can continue my science studies and be more confident of fulfilling my dream to become a Software Engineer. The Fellowship programme not only provides me with financial support, I am also participating in Computing and English communication skills courses and I am receiving regular mentoring and career counselling sessions."



Kusuma Excellence Fellow, Shashank Bhardwaj with medals for winning competitions. Photo: Kusuma Foundation

Kusuma Trust UK new office

The Kusuma Trust UK will be moving to new offices from 19 August 2016. Our new office address is:

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