



Oxford Policy Management

# KAZAKHSTAN: EXTERNAL EVALUATION, BOTA PROGRAMS

## Qualitative Assessment of the Tuition Assistance Programme

Report from the first round of the evaluation

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## Abbreviations

CCT	Conditional cash transfer
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MIS	Management information system
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PMT	Proxy Means Test
SSP	Social Services Programme
TAP	Tuition Assistance Programme

# 1 Assessment context and methodology

## 1.1 Context

### 1.1.1 Purpose of assessment report

The objective of this assessment report is to provide independent qualitative feedback on the processes and impacts of the BOTA tuition assistance programme (TAP).

Just prior to the final round of interviews that were undertaken for this report, the BOTA Board took a decision to change the parameters of the TAP as the initial funding for the BOTA programme ends in June 2014 so TAP students who started studying in 2011 are only guaranteed 3 years of funding. It is probable that an arrangement will be found to fund the final year of study for this intake of grantees, but otherwise BOTA is unable to commit to funding any further cohorts for four-year university courses. The final details of the new TAP grants for the 2012 round have yet to be finalised, but at the time of writing they can be broadly defined as:

- Grants for university students who meet the poverty criteria of the TAP, have less than three years to study, and who have dropped out for financial reasons. BOTA will identify applicants by asking universities for lists of students who have dropped out for financial reasons and invite them to apply.
- Grants for students to attend two-year college courses at highly rated colleges in subjects that are identified by BOTA as having the potential to lead to strong employment prospects upon graduation.

This development introduced a new dimension to this assessment – to provide feedback to BOTA on the possible implications of this change, but also has ended up influencing the final conclusions and recommendations of this assessment in order to make them relevant to the challenges facing BOTA and the TAP going forward, rather than dwelling on findings from the interviews which have less relevance to the new TAP format.

Face to face interviews were conducted in two stages in May and October 2011 in Almaty, Astana and Shymkent cities and surrounding oblasts. Phone interviews were conducted with students and other respondents from a number of other Oblasts – East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan and Zhambylskaya oblasts. Two focus groups with 11<sup>th</sup> grade children were also carried out in South Kazakhstan oblast and a group interview conducted with several members of the BOTA TAP team in Almaty. In total, the conclusions and recommendations in this report are drawn from 42 interviews and 2 focus group discussions.

### 1.1.2 Introduction to the BOTA Foundation TAP

Up to, and including, the third call for applicants, which closed at the end of March 2011, the TAP was targeting young people from the poorest 30% of households in Kazakhstan. These young people were in their final year of school, or had completed secondary school but not yet enrolled in higher education, had demonstrated their academic ability, and wanted to study. They were likely to complete their course of higher education study but, without the TAP grant to cover fees and some other expenses, would not be able to apply to university or college. The application process required applicants: to meet the technical criteria of the programme (be a Kazakhstani citizen, graduated or about to graduate from 11<sup>th</sup> grade and from the third round to be under age 29, fill in the application form correctly, provide the required information); to meet the criteria of the means test; to pass a ranking of essay answers from the application form and an interview with a selection panel (500 applicants interviewed in the 2010 round for 300 grants); to pass the state exams for completion of school and successfully get a place at the university of their choice. In addition,

applicants had to provide documentation proving income and family status. Home visits were made by BOTA to many of the short-listed applicants (300 in 2010) to confirm the means test.

Applicants could apply for any course of their choice, but for the 2011 round which closed on 31 March 2011, BOTA introduced a slight weighting (5% of overall marks awarded to an application during assessment) on courses which are core to the aims of the overall BOTA programme such as pedagogy, special needs education, preschool education and psychology. Applications for this round were also given weighting for activities that are more generally relevant to the overall BOTA programme aims such as medicine, and management, finance/accounting and jurisprudence if a candidate expresses his/her interest to work in non-commercial organizations after graduation.

Table 1.1 summarises some of the features and results of the grant rounds held to date:

**Table 1.1 Data on grant applications and grants awarded**

Data on grant applications and grants awarded	2009	2010	2011	Total 3 years
Number of received and registered applications	1675	2416	2527	6618
Number of technically eligible applications, entered into MIS	1444	1923	2136	5503
Number of grants awarded	87	234	328	649
Number of applicants per awarded grant	19:1	10:1	8:1	10:1
Percentage of grants awarded to students from rural areas	55%	50%	60%	55%
Number and % of students from top 7 poverty ranked regions (50% or more incidence of poverty below the minimum subsistence level)	63 72%	165 70%	232 71%	460 71%
% of grants awarded to girls	60%	73%	66%	66%
% of grants award to boys	40%	27%	34%	34%
% of students awarded grants in 2009 and 2010 who have stopped their studies before completion	13%	9%		

Source: BOTA M&E report September 2011, TAP team data, authors' calculations

### 1.1.3 Objective of assessment

This assessment report is a small part of a much larger impact and operational evaluation of the BOTA Foundation's programmes, including its Social Services Programme (SSP) and Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (CCT).

The objective is to review the operational arrangements of the TAP to understand its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in contributing to achieving the programme's objectives. As with the operational evaluation of the CCT and SSP, the assessment covers the entire process of grant administration, from the start-up of each grant round (targeting, application, selection, enrolment and registration), through to implementation (case management, payments, institutional relations and coordination) and monitoring and evaluation. The assessment also touches upon the adjustments to the TAP that BOTA plans to introduce in the next round.

The assessment presents findings on whether the processes set up by BOTA are relevant and effective enough to maximise the inclusion in the programme of the target group (students from

poor families applying to college or university) and what the major constraints are for those who either apply unsuccessfully or who do not apply at all.

A full list of evaluation questions is presented in Annex A.

The findings are intended to provide recommendations that are directed at helping BOTA to improve current processes and procedures, particularly as it prepares to introduce significant changes to the application procedures and the grant parameters for the TAP. BOTA already has well-established mechanisms in place to monitor and assess its programme. The study aims therefore to provide both independent corroboration of BOTA's own observations, and also to reveal challenges and successes not yet documented by BOTA's internal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process.

This report draws on interviews with those involved in the TAP process across the country and builds upon the findings, tentative conclusions and recommendations from the first round of interviews that were presented to BOTA in the rapid assessment report that was finalised in August 2011.

A second round of qualitative fieldwork will take place in a year's time to enable an assessment of changes in TAP's operational practices.

## **1.2 Assessment methodology**

As described above, this assessment of the TAP relies on semi-structured interviews conducted in Astana, Almaty, Shymkent and surrounding oblasts and by phone with respondents from East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan and Zhambylskaya oblasts. The following interviewees were covered: students who did or did not receive a grant, parents, university administrators, school teachers, education departments of local government authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that support the dissemination of TAP application forms on behalf of BOTA. Most interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings.

Interviewees in the early part of the fieldwork, in June, were selected from the list of all TAP applicants from throughout Kazakhstan who were currently studying or resident in Astana or Almaty, including successful and unsuccessful individuals, and their parents. These students were selected from different grant rounds, and with different residency status (urban, rural, living in college or university). Interviewees in the later stage of the fieldwork were selected from students currently studying or resident in Shymkent and from schools and colleges in nearby rayons in South Kazakhstan oblast and from a random selection of other oblasts – East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan and Zhambylskaya oblasts.

Students who were eligible but did not apply to the programme were also interviewed. These non-applicants were identified through the teachers of schools from which other students have applied and through TAP students.

Table 1.2 below provides a breakdown of the interviewees for this assessment. A full list of interviewees is provided in Annex B. This is not a representative sample, but is intended to offer a selection of feedback from a range of stakeholders, which can give a sense of some of the issues that they consider to be important for the TAP. It also provides the evaluation team with qualitative data to inform analysis about processes of the programme in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability as well as about outcomes of the TAP. It would have been helpful to talk to more non-applicants and rejected applicants, but this is an adequate sample for qualitative feedback given the overall purpose of this assessment.

**Table 1.2 TAP interviews and focus groups**

	Astana	Almaty	SKO <sup>1</sup>	EKO WKO Zhambyl skaya <sup>1</sup>	BOTA	Total
<b>Interviews with applicants</b>						
Successful applicants						
2009		2	1			3
2010	4	2	2	2		10
2011				2		2
Rejected applicants	1	1	1	2		5
Non-applicant	2	1				3
<b>Interviews with key informants</b>						
Parents - receiving students	1	1	2			4
Parents – non-receiving students			1	1		2
Teachers	1		3	1		5
University or College	1	1	1			3
Local authority or NGO	2		1	1		4
BOTA staff consulted					6	6
<b>Focus groups<sup>2</sup></b>						
11th grade students			2			2
<b>Total</b>						
Interviews	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>47</b>
Focus groups			<b>2</b>			<b>2</b>

Source: OPM. Note: (1) SKO = South Kazakhstan oblast. EKO = East Kazakhstan oblast. WKO = West Kazakhstan oblast. (2) In addition to these 2 focus groups help with 11th grade students, a short consultation was held with a group of students at a college in SKO about whether they had heard of the BOTA/TAP and what channels of communication they and their parents mostly use.

### 1.3 Report structure

The rest of this report presents results of the fieldwork under the following headings:

1. Relevance
2. Effectiveness
3. Efficiency
4. Sustainability
5. Outcomes

Section 3 then offers some conclusions and recommendations for the BOTA TAP.

## 2 Results from fieldwork

### 2.1 Relevance

The relevance of the TAP was assessed in various ways. First, we reviewed the relevance in terms of addressing key bottlenecks for students to attain higher education in Kazakhstan; second the flexibility the TAP gives students to study as they wish; and third the relevance of TAP to the government policies. Finally, the relevance of the TAP target groups was evaluated. We address relevance of community service and workshops below.

All interviewed students confirmed that the programme addresses the key reason why students from poor families do not apply to university, namely the lack of funding for fees. All interviewed students indicated that most universities in Kazakhstan do not give scholarships.

Other options to get funding for higher education include: the state educational grants programme which are for high achieving students regardless of their poverty status; the state programmes for orphans' education which provides a range of benefits and subsidies to children without parents, or who have lost the main breadwinner for as long as they are in education; Kazakh National University grants; selected university grants for rural students as part of a state programme and Oralmans (Kazakhs who lived in another country and returned to Kazakhstan in recent years); 10% discount for students with "Gold medals" which is an award given to the highest achieving school-leavers; the Tatischev Foundation<sup>1</sup>; and private funding by families or relatives. Taking into account the size of the population and the proportion of potential students from rural areas or poor families, coverage with the scholarship programmes is not sufficient. Therefore interviewees expressed the view that "a lot of talented students, especially in rural areas, can't get higher education because of the costs." Nearly all interviewed students indicated that they do not come from rich families, and they would have no other chance to study in universities without the TAP support. Some however might have studied at college without TAP support, or might have studied on university courses at poorer quality universities with lower and more flexible fee systems. Some universities and colleges, particularly those that have been more recently set up as 'commercial' universities, have a system of discretionary subsidies for students from poor families whereby the governing board of the college or university accepts requests from students to be considered for discounts for fees of around 50%<sup>2</sup>.

Similarly, all students confirmed that the TAP enables students to go to their desired place of learning, without restricting the choice of the academic institutions. There are other factors affecting students' decisions about where or what they want to study including the way in which the government grant programme is run – certain subjects are harder to get into as the government grant programme places more stringent requirements, for example, on courses such as foreign languages which are popular with students but less central to government policy than other more strategic subjects<sup>3</sup>, so it is harder to get a government grant for these courses. The BOTA/TAP grant in past rounds appears therefore to have offered a way forward for students who had little hope of getting a government grant, not because they are not high achievers, but because the subject they wanted to study has fewer government grantees and harder to achieve requirements than other subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://eng.tatischevfoundation.kz/> Tatischev foundation funds a limited number of students, with the obligation to work for them for a certain period.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with successful and rejected students and academic institution in SKO.

<sup>3</sup> Student interview, Shymkent

The BOTA monitoring of applications from all three rounds shows that an average of 92%<sup>4</sup> of applicants chose to attend a university rather than college. There are a number of possible reasons behind this:

- colleges are perceived to be more vocational as the BOTA 2009 review report concluded
- the BOTA funding allows students to choose a more prestigious / challenging / expensive further education option. The interviews conducted for this study tend to indicate that this is the main reason for the high level of preference for university courses among BOTA grantees and unsuccessful applicants. The very fact of knowing that the fees will be paid for makes it possible for students to consider a university application who otherwise would have only been able to consider a college application, a less prestigious university or a university evening course.
- it is not customary for students to apply to colleges after 11<sup>th</sup> class. It is much more customary for college applications to take place in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. College students might then move to university after a couple of years, and might be able to start in the second year of a university course as their college studies will be taken into consideration.

Interviewees report that the most well-known universities charge very high tuition fees, and get students mainly from rich families. Their perception is that it is rare that children from poorer families study in the same institutions, and only in cases where they are very bright and get either President's or TAP scholarships. The TAP scholarships are only given to applicants who are not awarded a state grant – if a student has applied to both the government grant programme and to the TAP, the BOTA TAP team waits for the government programme to publish its results in August at which point any students who were selected by the TAP are then removed from the list of grantees and another applicant is selected in their place. This underlines the role of the TAP in creating more equal opportunities for children from poor families, who may be high achievers, but not the highest flyers, to study in good academic institutions.

Interviewees also note that many institutions have difficulties with encouraging poor students to apply. Besides the financial matters mentioned above, the key issue mentioned in interviews is that children from poor families mainly study at worse schools, without the possibility to learn English or to use computers. In contrast, the children from affluent families are well prepared for applying to higher education facilities, as they graduate from good schools, get private lessons in English and any other subjects additionally paid for by the families, and know how to use computers. This difference becomes more evident for some TAP students studying together with the students from affluent families, particularly in Astana and Almaty, as they need to make more effort to catch up with differences in knowledge and skills with non-TAP students during the first couple of years. This did not appear, however, to be a significant problem in the long-run socially or academically. One college administrator interviewed, however, responded that her institution has no problems in attracting students and fulfilling their enrolment targets.

On the fit with other government policies, most respondents indicated that education is a priority for the country and its modernisation agenda, the President encourages the higher education of the new generation<sup>5</sup>, financially supports this process, and encourages the highest standards for the education institutions. Two of the TAP priority subjects – social sciences and medicine – overlap with the state grant scheme.

Interviewees also indicated that chances of getting a decent job increase significantly with a university education, and that therefore universities are valued highly. College education is perceived by interviewees as appropriate if individuals aim to get average level jobs, or intend to develop particular skills. Jobs without higher education are poorly paid (cleaners, waitresses,

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<sup>4</sup> BOTA TAP Monitoring and Evaluation report, September 2011

<sup>5</sup> For example through the Bolashak scholarship programme which is for post-graduate studies overseas

hairdressers), and/or physically demanding (construction / road workers / miners). For better paid jobs, most employers require a university diploma. This perception among TAP students and echoed by 11<sup>th</sup> graders consulted during focus group discussions at two schools is likely to present a considerable challenge to the TAP team as it takes forward the new TAP scheme from 2012 which will have a large component aiming to encourage 11<sup>th</sup> grade students to apply for college rather than university. Some of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students who had not yet given much thought to where they want to study at the time of the focus group discussions, indicated that if the only choice was a college, and they would be funded to attend, then they would consider it. Others, who had given more thought to their future academic careers, clearly expressed a preference for university and indicated that they would be unlikely to consider a college course after 11<sup>th</sup> grade, preferring to opt for a less prestigious university or a university evening course, as '*graduates of college courses are not valued*'. If they don't get into university, some of these students are willing to consider college courses in medicine, design and architecture or economics, but '*will only try this after first attempting to get into university*'.

Qualitative data from the interviews tends to support the data gathered by the TAP programme (see above), which indicates that TAP is well targeted to the poorest. Interviewees perceive that most TAP grants are given to those who need them most, who would otherwise not be able to get high academic degrees. Students may have some idea of the general suitability of their peers for the programme, and they mentioned only a few exceptional cases amongst their peer groups, where some people might have been wrongly involved in the programme, but were excluded after the case was revealed. On the other hand, the students also mentioned cases, where the children from affluent families applied for the TAP grants, but were not selected. The BOTA M&E system is able to monitor in some detail the stages at which students are excluded by the programme from the application process and a large majority are excluded before the assessments of essays is conducted – see Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Adapted from Indicator 1 from the BOTA MIS —Applicants by status for 2011**

Status	Number	% of applications received
Applicants not passing technical check	391	15,4%
Applicants who are orphans to whom the PMT is not administered	137	5,4%
Applicants to whom the PMT was administered	2125	84%
Applicants to whom the PMT was administered who earned score below the cut-off point	1201	47%
Applicants eligible for further stages of selection	1201	47%
Applicants not passing check of essay	513	20%
Applicants eligible for interview	688	27%
Applicants not passing interview	114	4,5%
Applicants passing interview	574	22%
Applicants not passing document check or home visit	113	4.5%
Finalists still eligible after home visits	461	
Finalists who were awarded state grants	102	
Finalists who refused the grant for their own reasons	23	

Finalists who didn't pass university/college exams	8	
In programme	328	12%
<b>Total number of applications received</b>	<b>2,527</b>	

Source: BOTA/TAP monitoring and evaluation report, August 2011; M&E department and TAP staff and author's calculations

The interviews conducted for this assessment tend to confirm that only the most motivated, academically able, or those who have some support from teachers, parents or other adults are able to get through each of the stages.

All interviewed individuals believed that BOTA does not publish the selection results, although the list of grantees for each round is available on the BOTA website (with region of origin, academic institutions and subjects). Successful students were approached individually by TAP staff, notifying them that they had been awarded a TAP grant, but students were not informed directly who else was and was not selected. If students were not informed directly by BOTA before the start of the academic year, they seem to assume that they were not selected.

## 2.2 Effectiveness

### 2.2.1 Outreach and advertising

The TAP is not a government programme and cannot aim to provide for all students or potential students in Kazakhstan. It can aim, however, as far as possible for a private foundation, to give equitable access to its programme for all students and potential students. Outreach and advertising is of key importance in ensuring equitable access – if students don't know about the programme, they cannot apply. BOTA has made considerable efforts across the three application rounds to increase access to the TAP. The TAP team produces and disseminates thousands of application packs for each round and works closely with NGOs, schools, universities and district education committees in order to ensure as far as possible that all those who might be eligible for the TAP, are aware of it. The TAP team sends out application forms to all who ask for them. The interviews undertaken for this qualitative study indicate that to some extent this approach has been successful, but also suggest that the channels for disseminating TAP information – teachers, NGOs, existing TAP students, universities and colleges - are to greater and lesser extents proactive so outreach is uneven and access is, therefore, possibly not as equitable as the BOTA/TAP intends.

On the whole, however, the BOTA/TAP is as equitable as can be expected for a relatively new, non-government tuition assistance programme that has had a limited number of grants to offer compared to the scale of the need. Considerable efforts were undertaken to further extend the reach of the programme (in its former format of offering 4 year grants) during the 2011 round and the BOTA team highlighted the following initiatives in addition to the dissemination approaches outlined above: TV advertisements in under-represented oblasts; letters to all oblast Departments of Education explaining the opportunity that TAP offered; an interactive video conference on TAP which was shown in every oblast in the country to MoE administrators and many teachers – over 300 schools participated in the conference; newspaper advertisements; training/education of CCT staff and volunteers who distributed applications to CCT households; a press release; web postings. Given that the number of grants is going to be even further reduced in the next rounds and the profile of the target TAP beneficiaries has changed, the need for equity of access is less relevant than it might have been if the TAP had continued in its previous format and at similar levels to the 2011 round.

Most of the interviewees first heard about the TAP from a schoolteacher or a school director. Students also named friends as a major source of information about BOTA/TAP. The BOTA review

of the 2009 application process found that teachers, NGOs, internet, friends and TV were the top sources of information about TAP cited by applicants and the latest internal monitoring information confirms that teachers, 'other' – assumed by BOTA to be NGOs - and friends were the main source of information about BOTA/TAP. Representatives of academic institutions and local government named newspapers, direct contact with BOTA and their TAP-funded students as a source of information and some of those interviewed had not heard of the TAP.

The first thought about the programme for most of the students was one of disbelief at such a wonderful opportunity. In all regions, students felt that it was a great and almost unbelievable opportunity. Students often indicated that at first they did not trust it was real, but when they checked the information on the internet or contacted (or in the case of Almaty applicants, visited) the BOTA foundation office, it seemed trustworthy and complete, so they decided to apply. Parents interviewed for this assessment also confirm this feeling of disbelief, of it being too good to be true and some students report having to convince their parents that it was not a trick and that it was worth applying. *'At first he didn't believe it and was sceptical throughout the application process...that I would be asked to do something in return...'* (Successful 2009 round student about her father's attitude to the first information about the TAP).

Interviewees felt that people should know about the programme more, that many people who are eligible to apply either don't know about the programme or mistrust what they have heard and therefore don't apply. In their view, the best way to inform people would be to educate school teachers in more detail about the TAP. Many teachers currently seem to lack knowledge. Even teachers who gave application forms to current TAP recipients lacked understanding of many parts of the TAP process. For instance, more than one teacher interviewed thought she could only inform three students (as she had three hard copies of the application) about this opportunity, and suggested others to wait until the next year. Some students report that teachers handed out the three application forms to the students they perceived to be 'poorest'. More than one teacher, rejected applicant and parent of a rejected applicant mentioned that potential applicants had found out too late, just before the deadline.

One teacher interviewed said she had received many application forms in 2009, had used left over applications in 2010, but didn't have any left over for 2011 and didn't receive any in 2011 and didn't know why. The TAP team confirmed in the group interview, that if she had not requested them, she would not have been sent them. The TAP team printed and disseminated 8000 application forms for the 2011 round and received 2136 applications of which 1862 were paper applications and 274 filled out online PMT applications so the importance of the printed applications for the majority of applicants is clear. Another respondent indicated that she had requested and disseminated 300 applications in her rayon and other parts of South Kazakhstan oblast. Generally, the interviews seem to indicate that the methods for distributing application information are not very systematic and depend to a large degree on the initiative and level of interest of a range of contacts from previous rounds. This issue appears to be causing a lack of equity of access to the TAP, even if the TAP has been ultimately successful in reaching its target group with grantees clearly meeting the TAP criteria – this issue of equity of access is discussed further in the conclusions and recommendations sections of this report.

Interviewees also felt that BOTA could engage students in disseminating information on TAP. Many of the successful TAP students interviewed for this assessment indicate that they have talked to other people in their home areas about the TAP, but their engagement with their own community appears to be uneven, with some more active than others in feeding back to their former schools, neighbours and friends. Some students and school children know about the TAP, but even in neighbouring rayons, students in one school or college may know and in another school or college not know about the TAP. Where NGOs have been involved in distributing

information<sup>6</sup>, the interviews tend to indicate that their role in passing on application forms and information varies greatly – one respondent, a teacher, said that she got a phone call, *‘from an NGO I know, they asked me to help with handing out application forms to schools, but they didn’t really tell me much about the programme’*. Another respondent from a local NGO said that help had been provided on how to fill out the application form, what to write in the essay and other detailed guidance. The students helped by this NGO are clearly at an advantage over those helped by the other. One successful TAP student best sums up the issue of outreach as follows: *‘I think the information provided by the TAP is good and clear, giving clear criteria and a clear process for applying...what is not clear is how that information is then passed on by other people in the region. It would be good to have a TAP representative locally, an office...’*

The interviews undertaken for this assessment have underlined that BOTA should continue to recognise the extent to which the internet is not available to a large number of potential TAP applicants. The large print-run of application formats (8000 in the 2011 round) disseminated by the BOTA/TAP team during the application process demonstrates an understanding of this issue by the TAP team and the low percentage of online applications confirms the lack of use of internet reported by interviewees. One of the focus groups among 11<sup>th</sup> graders and a short consultation with a group of college students in one rayon confirmed that they have little or no access to the internet. Even for students in an oblast capital, internet access can be problematic with very few households having internet access at home. Whereas this constraint may apply to a lesser extent for potential applicants in Astana and Almaty, they are less likely to be eligible for the TAP according to the poverty criteria. Respondents have confirmed that even where a class teacher in a rural area may have internet access, for example, it may not always be feasible to print off additional application forms or spend the time with students completing online forms. The TAP team confirms that they have a good understanding of this issue and don’t rely on the website as their only form of communication with potential applicants. However, publication of TAP results, for example, are published on the website, but could usefully be published in regional and national newspapers and other media channels.

Face-to-face communication of information about TAP seems to work best – an approach suggested by students and teachers particularly. When someone has come from the TAP, whether a representative of BOTA or an NGO that has been mandated by BOTA to visit schools and give information, this has had the most impact. Parents seem to have the highest levels of mistrust and misinformation as a result of this lack of face-to-face contact and several respondents in these interviews, students and teachers particularly, stressed the importance of addressing information to parents as they are the main decision-makers for many potential applicants. On the whole, the interviews confirm that if the TAP were to continue in its previous form, then BOTA was on the right track in intensifying communication with the government, academic institutions, schools, orphanages, and NGOs in all oblasts of Kazakhstan to spread the information about the TAP.

With the new rules being applied to the next round, the BOTA/TAP team will need to plan a careful information campaign to ensure that the new rules are clearly communicated to the new target group. The interviews conducted for this assessment tend to indicate that, in its third year, the TAP has started to gain the trust of many teachers, students, parents, local authorities and universities. The planned shift in rules for funding grants from 2012 onwards will require this constituency of BOTA/TAP supporters to take a further step of faith and be ready to communicate the changes clearly to the target audience, particularly to 11<sup>th</sup> graders and their parents. Two interviews in particular should ring warning bells for the BOTA/TAP team in terms of issues that will need to be addressed during the information campaign for the 2012 round:

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<sup>6</sup> Mainly SSP grantees who have been asked by the TAP team to disseminate application packs, and information about the TAP, in their region

- one teacher spoke about a TAP student from her school who comes from a large family and whose *'younger brother had also completed 11<sup>th</sup> grade and, because the TAP is only for one sibling at a time<sup>7</sup>, has been waiting for his brother to complete his studies so that he can apply to university too...'*
- one successful TAP student also spoke about her younger sibling and her desire that he, too, should ... *'have the same opportunities that I have had'*

The expectations of TAP grantees for their younger siblings will need to be managed carefully as the new rules are introduced for the TAP.

## 2.2.2 Targeting

### Targeting the poorest

The TAP appears to be reaching both the rural and urban poor with 55% of TAP students come from rural areas (see Table 1.1 above). It is interesting to note a gender imbalance among TAP grantees, with girls consistently outnumbering boys by almost 2:1, which is more marked than a similar bias in the national education trends where 52% of students are female and 48% are male. It could be that boys are more likely to study vocational subjects at colleges than girls and that the new parameters for the TAP, with a focus on vocational education in colleges may shift the gender bias towards male students in the 4<sup>th</sup> round. Ultimately, there is probably very little that the TAP can or should do to address this question of gender balance, beyond continuing to monitor.

The TAP appears to have been successful in recruiting students who are likely to complete their course of study with a drop out rate running at 11%. It is too early to determine the numbers of students from the 2011 intake who are likely to stop their studies early, but if the rate continues somewhere around 10-15%, then this seems like a reasonable indicator of a successful selection process with around 90% of TAP students currently on target to complete their university courses<sup>8</sup>.

TAP students come from all regions of Kazakhstan, with 71% coming from seven regions ranked highest in the poverty ranking used for the CCT part of the BOTA programme<sup>9</sup> (see Figure 2.1 below). The proportion of grants for students from these seven regions has held steadily at around 70-72% across the three rounds. Better outreach and targeting in the 2010 and 2011 rounds, following BOTA's analysis<sup>10</sup> of the applications received in the 2009 round, appears to have led to an increase in grants awarded to students from regions that were poorly represented in the first round – for example nine grants were awarded to students from Atyrauskaya in 2010 and 12 in 2011 as opposed to one in 2009. Mangystauskaya, although the highest ranked for poverty with over 82% of households estimated by the CCT ranking from 2009 to be below the minimum subsistence level, continues to have a low number of successful TAP grantees.

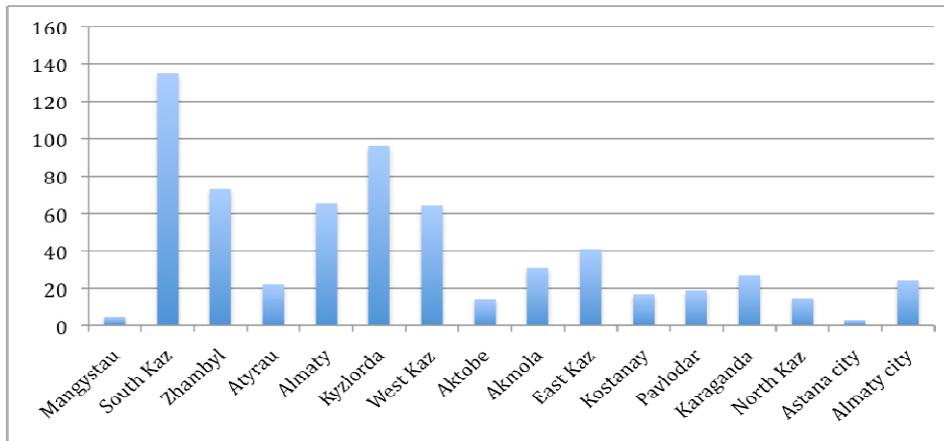
<sup>7</sup> This teacher, the main disseminator of TAP information in her school, did not know that the TAP does not have such a rule. It was not possible to clarify whether she had been given misinformation at some point or whether she had made her own assumption about there being such a rule and not checked it with BOTA.

<sup>8</sup> One report, now a bit out of date, suggests an overall drop out rate from higher education in Kazakhstan of 16% in 2004 (OECD, 2007)

<sup>9</sup> Conditional Cash Transfer Implementation Manual, BOTA Foundation, 10 May 2011 p7 fig.2

<sup>10</sup> Bornstein, A., 'Analysis of TAP Applications', internal report, 24 July 2009

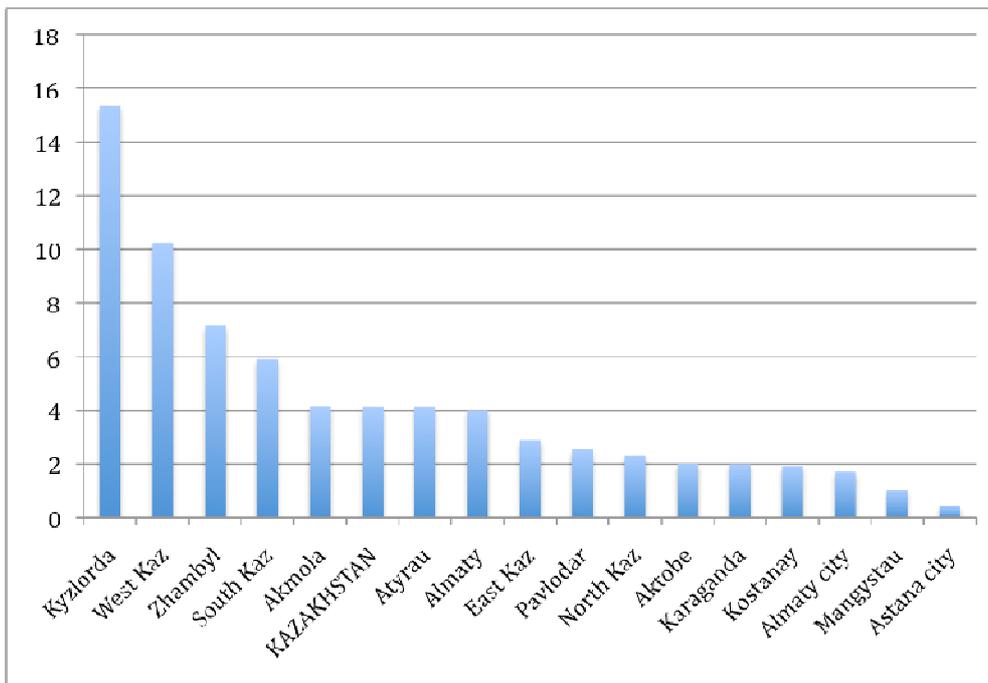
**Figure 2.1 Number of TAP grantees per oblast, in order of poorest to least poor oblast**



Source: BOTA M&E report September 2011, CCT Manual, May 2011 and author's calculations. Note: Mangystauskaya oblast is the poorest, and Almaty city the least poor.

It would appear that the targeting of TAP in relation to incidence of poverty is good and proportional also to population levels, see Figure 2.2 below.

**Figure 2.2 Rate of TAP grantees per 100,000 population, by oblast**



Source: BOTA M&E report September 2011, CCT Manual, May 2011 and author's calculations.

Kyzylordinskaya and West Kazakhstan stand out as having a much higher rate of TAP students per 100,000 population in the oblast, at more than three times the national TAP average for Kyzylordinskaya. Given that these two oblasts rank among the seven poorest oblasts, this probably is not a cause for concern, but the higher rate of applicants from the four oblasts that are above the national TAP average, may bear further investigation as the TAP team prepares to roll out the new TAP scheme. This issue is discussed further below under section 2.2 'Effectiveness' particularly in relation to equity of access.

This prevalence of TAP grantees from the poorest regions both in actual numbers, as a percentage of the overall TAP population and as a proportion of the populations of those poorer areas tends to confirm that TAP is reaching its intended target group. The only exception is Mangystauskaya, which, as the poorest oblast, should have an at least average rate of grantees per 100,000 population. It could be that as the number of TAP grantees grows in 2012 and 2013 before starting to drop as the 2010 and 2011 intakes start to graduate, these differences will be ironed out as they are not statistically significant given the small size of the current TAP grantee pool. Nevertheless, it is useful to look at rates, as the perception of the BOTA TAP team appears to be that the larger numbers of grantees from South Kazakhstan oblast might somehow represent an imbalance in the programme. This is somewhat mitigated, when we see that as a proportion of the size of the oblast (by population), it is easily within the realms of where it should be, especially given the high levels of poverty in South Kazakhstan oblast which is ranked second after Mangystauskaya with a rate of almost 72% of households living below the minimum subsistence level.

So the TAP reaches many of the poorest potential students, and seems to be reasonably well targeted to the poorest and to orphans with 65% of applicants (see Table 2.1 above) progressing beyond the stage of the PMT in 2011. Many students who might have been eligible according to the poverty criteria, however, are not applying because they: either don't know about the programme, found out too late, or found the application process too unclear.

### Targeting boys vs. girls

Similarly, as discussed above, the TAP appears to be reaching disproportionately more female students than male. One hypothesis offered by BOTA is that in the poorest families parents may be underestimating the benefits of higher education for their male children. Another explanation could be that male children are expected to start work after school (11th grade), or they more frequently drop out after 9<sup>th</sup> grade or earlier, to attend vocational college, and the BOTA requirement is to have completed 11<sup>th</sup> grade of the secondary school. More systemic, intensive and lengthy information campaigns could also help to target potential male applicants – for example by extending the information sessions to 9<sup>th</sup> grade in order to reach boys who may be considering entry into vocational college after 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Targeting orphans

Some 90 orphans applied in the 2010 round and 137 in the 2011 round, which represents 5% and 6% of the applicants respectively, but among successful applicants, the proportion of orphans is higher – see Table 2.2:

**Table 2.2 Proportion of TAP grantees who are orphans**

Round	Grants awarded to orphans	Total number of grants awarded	% of grants awarded to orphans
2009	8	87	9.2
2010	36	234	15.3
2011	40	328	12.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>12.9</b>

Source: BOTA, M&E report, August, 2011 and TAP staff

### 2.2.3 The application process

Overall, the application process was considered straightforward, clear and acceptable (though largely based on accounts from successful applicants).

### **The application form**

Most of the students interviewed indicated that they submitted paper based applications; although some applied online without any difficulties. BOTA data confirms that around 15-16% of applicants apply online. Costs related to the application process reported by TAP students and parents included costs for making copies of documents and travel costs. Some applicants travelled from villages to oblast centres to deliver the application by hand. All shortlisted applicants travelled for interview, and BOTA compensated their travel costs.

Most of the interviewees indicated that the criteria for selection were clear, well publicised and adhered to, so there was no need to change any of this. Some of the students interviewed suggested improving the questions regarding the property owned by families and parents, as it was a little difficult to understand and fill in. More specifically, this was related to measurements related to the home and land in the Kazakh application.

Many students found writing the essays easy and enjoyable. Some, both successful and unsuccessful, however, found the essay to be the most difficult part of the application form requiring more time and thought.

Most of the students were helped by their parents, children's home director or another adult in filling in the application form, especially with the collection of necessary documents. This tends to indicate that TAP might want to find ways of communicating with parents as well as with potential applicants and their teachers – a 'parents' page on the website and a leaflet or brochure aimed at parents as part of the application pack might be worth considering.

### **The validation exercise**

Several interviewees indicated that BOTA checked their homes to validate the information provided in the application regarding the social-economic status of applicants, when "*they asked questions about the flat and how many people lived here, and looked around.*" There were no issues raised about this process among those interviewed.

### **The interview**

Students seemed to find the interviews easier than they expected, despite the fact that they were conducted by a potentially intimidating panel of two representatives of BOTA and two independent selection committee members. One rejected applicant, who had been rejected following interview, reported that she had not known that the interview was part of the selection process, that she had been '*phoned a week before and they told me to come and bring my documents...the interview lasted 5 minutes...[they asked] about my family.*' She had not prepared for the interview in any way and was not told whether she had been selected or not until a long time after when she received a phone call saying '*you have not been selected, you can try again in December.*'

Perhaps inevitably, rejected applicants interviewed for this assessment, tend to have more negative recollections about the interview process. Most TAP grantees have positive memories of the interview '*It was approximately 20 minutes. They asked questions mostly about my essay, my future job, about history of Kazakhstan. At the end of the interview they praised me and said they were very impressed by me.*' These recollections are more representative of the established TAP interview procedure that is followed by the selection committees.

### **BOTA support in the application process**

Some of the students mentioned that they used the hotline to consult BOTA staff during the application process. Some of them said they "*called a couple of times per week; asked questions regarding the application form. It was really helpful; employees of BOTA were nice, as they answered the same questions more than once.*" Some said they did not use the hotline – '*No, I didn't need to.*' '*No I didn't know it existed.*' If BOTA is planning to continue the TAP into the future, it would be useful to gain an understanding of whether use of the hotline is a factor in

helping students to go further in the application process. At present, the only data the TAP team can access relating to the hotline is the number and dates of the calls.

Students also underlined the flexibility of BOTA in adjusting to students' needs in setting up TAP interviews. One TAP student mentioned that BOTA changed the date for her interview, because it clashed with her final project exam at the college. The interview went well, as did her final exam, and she became a TAP beneficiary.

### **Decision-making and feedback**

Most of the applicants described the way BOTA gives feedback on the application as the following: *"If the application passes the initial assessment, individuals are invited to interview, so you understand your documents and the essay were selected for the next round."* Sometimes applicants were called by BOTA later and informed that they were successful.

The long delay between the interview and home visit (when it took place, most, but not all successful applicants were visited after the interview) and the phone call with the final result is reported as a source of stress for both successful and rejected applicants: *'I didn't sleep for a month, I was very anxious...waiting to hear...it was hard.'* (TAP grantee, 2010 round); *'I spent a year on the application [interviewer; but it took 3 months from application to notification of rejection], I mean it felt like a year'.*

### **Comparison with other application processes**

When asked to compare the TAP application process with other grant programmes, many students compared it to the application for government scholarships. The difference outlined was that if the student achieves the required score in the National exam, then the government scholarship is issued automatically, regardless of the socio-economic status of the family, and without any additional documents. There is a high level of understanding among students, teacher and other interviewees about the criteria by which government grants are chosen. The fact that the TAP enquires as to the economic status of families / students was well understood and appreciated.

### **Rejected applicants**

The TAP programme is now moving to a new phase with a new set of application criteria for a new set of target beneficiaries and significantly fewer grantees planned than in previous rounds. One lesson that can be taken forward from previous rounds that might be relevant is that feedback from rejected, as well as successful, applicants can help to fine-tune the TAP processes and offer an outlet for rejected applicants to interact constructively with BOTA. If the costs are not too high, it might be worth administering a questionnaire to rejected applicants in future rounds, along with their rejection letter, in order to inform continued improvements in outreach, clarity of information provided to applicants and other elements of continuing to ensure a strong application process for the TAP.

#### **2.2.4 Interactions with BOTA/TAP staff**

All interviewed students indicated that they have very frequent and friendly interactions with TAP staff. One of the students mentioned that she considered her TAP curator *"her second mother, who is very attentive, supportive and friendly."*, an attitude that was echoed by others, including parents: *'they want to do well for her (the TAP curator), they don't want to let her down'* (parent of siblings, TAP grantees)

Students indicated that they frequently meet TAP staff, call them, interact through e-mails, and during the workshops. The subjects of discussion include university life and grades, discussions on the best strategies for studying better, academic performance, also some aspects of everyday life and any difficulties students face. Students get advice from TAP staff in case they have any difficulties with tuition or conflicts and misunderstandings with faculties.

Students consider TAP staff support very much needed and useful. These relations encourage students to study harder, and think positively about their future. All interviewed students underlined that they never had problems with TAP staff. While this level of pastoral care for grantees is undoubtedly important, BOTA may want to shift slightly the emphasis of its staff inputs towards the pre-application and application phases – greater nurturing of children from poorer villages/lower quality schools through access programmes or more intensive outreach interventions could help to ensure greater numbers of poorer and more excluded young people are given the great opportunity that TAP undoubtedly offers.

Students underlined the effectiveness and relevance of the monitoring arrangements. No additional recommendations were given on improvements.

## **2.3 Efficiency**

### **2.3.1 Duration of application**

For most of the applicants it took from two weeks to a month to fill in applications and collect all the necessary documents. It took about two months for students to be invited to interviews. Most of the applicants were notified in late August about the selection results – just prior to the start of the academic year. In nearly all cases, this meant they had to act very quickly, at very short notice, to prepare for university, but they don't see this as a problem – their excitement at their success appears to carry them through this period!

One or two students report having to wait considerable lengths of time on the day of their interview even though they had been asked to come at a specific time. TAP staff report that sometimes delays in starting interviews are inevitable, as earlier scheduled interviewees show up late or applicants show up early and have to wait.

### **2.3.2 Payments**

Almost all interviewed students indicated that TAP payments always come on time. The only exception amongst those interviewed was when the payment was delayed but after a short interaction between the student and the TAP staff it was resolved. There were very few cases of such delays in transferring stipends (maximum five days) mentioned by some students.

There is an established process on how payments are made. The student should obtain a claim from the academic institution twice a year, and then BOTA transfers money very quickly after the claim is submitted to the TAP. No delays were mentioned by the representatives of academic institutions. The stipend and other allowances (rent and transport) are transferred to student bank accounts on a monthly basis. The stationery allowance is transferred twice a year at the beginning of the trimester in September and January.

The students have to provide receipts for their expenditure of the stationery allowance – something which not all of them knew about which caused some problems:

'We went to the market to buy stationery and other supplies for the university, but then it turned out that we had to have receipts and go to a stationery store where it was more expensive. It wasn't a problem – we took everything back to the market and got the money back and then went to the store. But it was more expensive.'  
(Parent).

### **2.3.3 Cost of applying**

The cost to the student of applying for the grant is minimal and mainly related to postal costs or travel costs if the application is delivered by individuals, or incurred while students travel for interviews. Most interviewees mentioned that BOTA reimburses travel costs.

### **2.3.4 Adequacy of the grant amount**

TAP covers all expenses related to the education of the TAP student. These include rent, transport, stationery expenses, and a stipend for living costs. BOTA also pays the stipend during the summer: one student pointed this out as an advantage over other grant programmes.

There was a range of opinions about the adequacy of the stipend which fell into three broad groups. First, most of the students indicated that stipend is appropriate and gives them the possibility to live a moderate life.

Some other students said that the stipend is not only enough, but it allows them to give money to their parents, as the families are in great need. For other students the stipend is mainly spent on books that they wanted to buy for a long time; and the rest is spent on transport, books and other everyday costs.

A third group suggested that BOTA should slightly increase the stipend as it is barely enough to cover the basic needs of the student, especially if they don't live with their parents. They gave the comparison with another grant administered by the Kazakhstan National Technical University, which is higher. Others mentioned that the government grant is going to go up to 18,000 Tenge and suggest that the TAP should also go up to that amount.

Nearly all of the interviewed students mentioned that if the funding were to cease, students would not be able to continue their studies. The same information was collected from parents and family members, who indicated that without the TAP they would not be able to cover the education costs of their children. Some students stated that they would probably start working and study part-time; or try to apply for other fellowships, but this would be very difficult.

## **2.4 Outcomes**

### **2.4.1 Perceptions of improvements in academic performance, knowledge and skills**

All students indicated that the TAP inspires students to study better and get better scores. The perception is that BOTA checks transcripts, so you have to be a good student, and if performance worsens, then the student could be excluded from the TAP. Students appreciate, however, that they are under slightly less pressure than grantees on the government grant programme who always have to get 5s. TAP students can get 4s and even the occasional 3 – they are only excluded if they consistently get 2s, which is the threshold for being excluded by the university anyway. Many TAP students get 5s though and BOTA awarded these high achievers with an event in September in Almaty at which they were given laptops – this encouragement is greatly valued by parents and the students themselves.

Students that have TAP fellowships consider that they work harder at universities than they might otherwise without a grant. Despite this, the impression of respondents is that academic scores for the TAP students are not always the best among their peers, especially in Astana and Almaty. The reason provided is that it is very difficult to compete with students from affluent families, as they usually graduate from good schools, and have very strong background, as well as good knowledge of English and computing skills. TAP students, by contrast, are more usually graduates from lower quality, often rural, schools, with typically lower levels of training and preparedness.

Overall, the impression is that the TAP inspires students to put more effort into their education and achieve better academic results not only once they get to university, but before that, in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when they are working towards their UNT and preparing their TAP application.

#### **2.4.2 Perceived benefits and challenges with the community service component of the grant**

Students take part in different types of community services. Some of them helped during the Asian Winter Olympic Games; some worked for charity organisations; others helped the elderly, with buying food and medicine, and cleaning their houses. Some others helped at orphanages, teaching children English, and working at kindergartens and/or institutions providing services to children with disabilities.

Students report that they learned a lot during the community work. Depending on the type of community services they were involved in, some learned how to help care for and feed babies; others learned how to be a teacher, for example, how to use different teaching techniques depending on the age of your students; some students said it was a bit difficult psychologically to work with disabled children and elderly, but they got used to it afterwards. Overall, they have learned how to communicate with people and take care of them.

Community services are perceived as useful because one is helping those that need help. The plans of most of the students include doing more community work next year, but changing the type/area of assistance.

Almost all students underlined that their sense of responsibility towards their community has been changed. Now they think everyone should help as everyone can do so, no matter what his social status is. One of the students said,

“I learned that everyone should help if they have an opportunity to do so. I have always thought that you should give back and try to help. BOTA gives a great opportunity to do exactly that”.

Another student said she was proud of herself for helping disabled children.

One of the students made a very interesting conclusion about the way TAP inspires students to help others: *“TAP helps you learn how to help others – I've been helped by unknown people from TAP, and it modified my life enormously, now I want to help others!”*

Most of the interviewees confirmed that they like this part of the programme and they look forward to the next community service projects. Some of them suggested that BOTA help with organising community services according to the profile/faculty of students.

#### **2.4.3 Perceptions of the usefulness of the workshops**

BOTA workshops are provided twice a year to TAP students, to bring them together in their region, support the development of joint understanding on important social relations / interaction / personal development issues, and facilitate interrelations between them. Workshops are well attended and appreciated by students.

Citations on the workshops from interviewed students include the following:

“Workshops are very useful in terms of interaction and developing contacts with our peers”;

“BOTA plans the workshop agenda well, they feed us well; they help us to discuss various topics, for example, the topic for the last workshop was communication/socialization and interaction between peers and academics. We play games, and after the workshop we are all friends”.

Workshops also help development of contacts between students and BOTA staff.

“Some games help to develop logic”;

“Some others teach how to behave during the interview.”

“We learned to read and interpret body language”.

“They teach us how to behave in life, how to talk to people. I have already used a couple of techniques, it really works... ”

“Workshops help to improve mood and self-confidence... ”

“Actually everything we learn during the seminars can be used in real life”.

“It also helps with increasing students’ motivation to study better.”

Thus, students think workshops are very important in their future career and look forward to the next workshops.

Most of the students said the workshops were very good as they were now, and should remain conducted in the same format. Some others suggested changing the timing of workshops, making the second year workshops at the beginning of the year, as conducting them closer to finals is not practical, and sometimes, despite a great desire, students don’t have time to attend. Others suggested that BOTA should organise talks with famous people on relevant topics. Many students expressed willingness to conduct more workshops per year, or at least have two-day workshops twice a year outside the cities. Several students indicated that they would appreciate an opportunity to meet not only with other students from their own region, but with students from other regions of Kazakhstan.

#### **2.4.4 Has the grant brought about any changes in social relations, particularly for students from residential institutions?**

Students mentioned various areas in which the TAP brought changes for them. Some stated that *“it became easier to talk to other people”*; others became very active in student life. One student was proud to be *“a head of the dance society and also teach Spanish to first years”*. Others say they became happier. Students said they are now more confident in themselves; one of them said she *“now only gets 5s...”* Another student, with disabilities, said that her life has been transformed – if she hadn’t got this grant and started to study she *‘would have been sitting at home with my mother.’*

The same information emerged from discussions with parents and family members. One of the parents said, *“She is very active in student life: takes part in comedy shows and dancing society.”* Another parent said that her daughter is,

“more confident in the future and more ambitious. She did community service at the children’s orphanage “Zhanuya” and really enjoyed it, but I think she has always been caring for the community. Attitude

towards education changed in the sense that she became more ambitious and willing to study well”.

Most of the applicants think that the programme is well thought through and strongly supports the improvement of professional and personal characteristics of students. It changes students' lives and fortunes. One of the students said “*TAP gives me my future; it enhances my self-confidence and esteem*”. Another said, ‘*I had no purpose in life before, now I have a purpose, I know what I want to do in the future*’. Other students consider that the TAP teaches them to develop skills for relationships, gain friends and become more socially networked.

Most of the students said that the TAP helped their families economically and psychologically: “*Our education/future is not any more a burden for our families.*” One of the students was proud to say that the “*TAP helped my family; they are stimulated by TAP as much as I am. Now they believe we can do better in future all together and individually.*” There was not enough data to look specifically at outcomes for children from residential institutions (orphans) – this can be pursued in the later stages of the evaluation.

## 3 Conclusions and recommendations

This section sets out some conclusions emerging from the fieldwork results with a particular focus on those conclusions and recommendations that are of relevance to the changed TAP going forward.

### 3.1 Summary conclusions

#### 3.1.1 Relevance and Impact

In accordance with its aims, these interviews and a review of available BOTA data indicate that TAP has reached some of the poorest young people from a range of the poorest regions of Kazakhstan and giving them a huge opportunity – a university education at an education establishment of their choice to study a course of their choice – which, it would appear, they almost certainly would otherwise not be able to access. It is interesting that students interviewed mention the importance of TAP particularly where there are many children in a family and parents might be able to afford to pay fees for one child, *'by selling their last head of cattle for example'* (Teacher interview), but not for two or more.

It is clear that for these students, lack of funding was the major constraint to accessing a university education. Without BOTA they might have gone to college; trained in a short course, such as hairdressing, that could get them into quick, if low paid, employment; attended a less prestigious local university with lower fees but of lower quality; or studied on less expensive evening courses that would take longer to complete. But most likely they would not have been able to study at all. *'He would have continued working at the brick factory where he had a summer job if he hadn't got this grant.'* (Parent of a TAP grantee)

One or two of the rejected applicants interviewed, were rejected because they had received other grants. Another had gone to a 'commercial' university where the fees were considerably lower. This is clearly not a representative sample, but does tend to indicate that those interested in applying to TAP are clearly motivated towards higher education.

Grantees interviewed for this study are clear that TAP has not only given them a great opportunity to study, but it motivates them to study hard and they have also gained confidence, social and life skills and expanded horizons from the training workshops provided by BOTA and from the community service elements of the programme. While some respondents indicate that TAP students tend initially not to perform as well academically as their peers from wealthier families, this inequality may be evened out by the end of the course of study. Another grantee, however, states for example that TAP students do as well as or better than others as *'as they are already good students and they understand the value of their education'*.

#### 3.1.2 Effectiveness

There are some questions emerging about how effective the BOTA/TAP has been in ensuring equity of access, and therefore unknown numbers of potentially eligible applicants not applying – questions which BOTA itself examined and took action on following the 2009 round. The interviews for this study raise the question in particular about whether there are potentially eligible applicants in more remote or rural areas, or even in larger cities, who are not applying because they, their teachers and parents simply do not know about, or have too little information about, TAP.

On the whole the application format is seen as reasonably straightforward, although the section on means testing is seen by some as complicated – some grantees interviewed made recommendations on improving the clarity of some parts of the Kazakh version, particularly the

parts relating to the PMT. On the whole the application format is fit for purpose. BOTA provides a high level of support to applicants who have decided to apply, but it might be worth considering options for providing more face-to-face support in order to increase eligible applications and prevent candidates from excluding themselves if they find the form complex or inaccessible and have no adult who can help them to complete it.

It is clear that BOTA has an effective monitoring system in place which is providing data for analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the programme, particularly in terms of those who have successfully applied and are receiving grants, and that the TAP team has made adjustments after each round in order to incorporate lessons learned. Monitoring of non-successful applicants and non-applicants could be strengthened. The adjustments to the 2011 round aimed to boost levels of grants targeting BOTA programme core areas as the first two rounds have only 6% of grants in social work, early years teaching, sociology, psychology and special needs education – all areas critical to the SSP and CCT elements of the programme.

The Board of Trustee decision to change the parameters of the TAP to focus on university students who drop out for financial reasons and on providing two year College education for 11<sup>th</sup> graders will present a particularly strong communications challenge in terms of:

- ensuring a clear message is given to potential applicants well before the deadline for applications about the new eligibility criteria and the new types of grants given that after three years, many of the schools, NGOs, universities and other key BOTA/TAP information dissemination partners have now gained an idea of what the BOTA/TAP is.
- ensuring equity of access for all potential applicants in a systematic way that is convincingly transparent
- minimising reputational risks among those whose expectations may have been raised about the nature of the next TAP round including: younger siblings of existing TAP grantees; students from schools with one or more existing TAP grantees.

### **3.1.3 Efficiency**

The cost to the student of applying for TAP is low and most costs incurred, such as attending interviews, are reimbursed by BOTA. The cost to BOTA per student of both the application process and the subsequent support to the grantees will be determined in the costing report which accompanies this qualitative assessment. The proportion of applicants who pass the proxy means test has risen from 1/3 in the 2009 round to more than 2/3 in the 2011 round, which indicates that the efficiency of targeting has significantly improved over the three rounds. This proportion is net of a higher number of orphan applicants in the 2011 round who don't have to take the PMT.

Students who have been awarded grants have no complaints about the system of payments or support from BOTA – any delays are quickly resolved and levels of support from BOTA are high.

### **3.1.4 Sustainability**

In the short term, this study indicates that students would be unlikely to continue their studies if TAP were to be discontinued although some students do mention back-up strategies of working and studying part-time which would considerably challenge their ability to meet the requirements of their courses and eventually graduate.

Other aspects of sustainability of the TAP which BOTA monitors are the potential longer term economic impact on the students' households of their further education achievements and anticipated subsequent employment. Until now, the TAP aimed to fund all four years of each grantees' course as long as they do not fail. Starting from the 2012 round it aims to fund those who have dropped out of their course for financial reasons with two or three years remaining, or to fund

two-year college courses for 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Its sustainability therefore lies in achieving a high output of graduates in the medium to long term who are able to go on to paid employment commensurate with their level of education and 'give back' some of their future earnings and potential to their families and communities. Responses to TAP questionnaires by students from the 2009 and 2010 rounds show that about 1/3 of these students are not sure they will return to their regions of origin on completion of their four year course. This is not to say they will not end up contributing to the economic well-being of their families and communities. If they are studying in Astana or Almaty, for example, their chances of securing well-paid employment which is commensurate with their newly acquired level of education are probably higher in these cities than in their regions of origin.

### **3.1.5 Outcomes**

Outcomes of TAP that can be noted to date as a result of this assessment are overwhelmingly positive for those who have received the grants and are continuing with their studies. Their confidence, academic performance and plans for the future have all improved. Less is known about the outcomes for those who were not selected, although some of those interviewed did continue with their studies either with other grants or at less expensive education institutions. Once the first TAP intake from 2009 starts to graduate, it will be possible for the TAP to start to monitor longer term outcomes and impact in terms, for example, of access to employment and economic well-being of the TAP grantee household.

## **3.2 Recommendations for the TAP**

Recommendations provided below focus on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Specifically, recommendations are offered on helping to introduce the new TAP going forward.

### **3.2.1 Outreach, targeting and transparency**

The goal of the new TAP is to specifically reach students who have dropped out of university with three or less years left to complete their course and students who have completed 11<sup>th</sup> grade and want to start two year college courses. Given that a limited number of grants can be awarded, and given that there is a challenge in managing the expectations of existing TAP supporters, the outreach and information priorities going forward are very different than in previous rounds when equity of access was important, particularly in poorer oblasts.

Strategies for targeting potential applicants have not yet been finalised by BOTA, but the following options are possible ways of ensuring appropriate applications :

- asking universities to inform students who dropped out from universities for financial reasons about the new TAP
- asking TAP grantees to disseminate information in their universities
- targeting colleges with information about the new TAP,
- targeting 11<sup>th</sup> graders through the existing TAP network of schools, education committees and NGOs

This assessment of the former TAP has shown that where possible, face-to-face communication, particularly with parents and teachers, is considered to be the best way of ensuring that messages about the new TAP are not distorted.

Information formulated differently for students, teachers and parents will help to ensure that the messages that TAP wants to convey are communicated to key stakeholders in the outreach, targeting and information dissemination process.

Offering rejected applicants information about the outcomes from the TAP application rounds and the opportunity to complete a questionnaire about their experience of the application process, may help to further fine-tune the information, outreach and transparency of the programme going forward.

### **3.2.2 Improving the TAP application process**

The TAP reviews the application form in Kazakh and Russian regularly, but this assessment has shown that there are still problem areas – particularly in sections related to the assessment of socio-economic status of families. Involving TAP grantees annually in these reviews will help to address the complexity of required technical language related to means tested reviews, as well as difficulties/modifications generated during translation of questionnaires/application forms.

Reducing, where possible, the length of time that applicants have to wait after the application process is complete and before they receive the result of the application will help to reduce stress.

### **3.2.3 Improving publicity of TAP operation and outcomes**

- Intensify publication of information on TAP operation and outcomes, through diversifying the methods of publicity in addition to placing selection results on the website and Facebook. This assessment confirms that currently not everyone has access to this information – possibly through a lack of web access, particularly in rural areas – and the traditional media are cited by most respondents as being the best and most accessible channels of communication for this information.

Consider options for developing a TAP alumni group, beginning with current grantees, who can play a role in attracting applicants for as long as TAP continues and can help secure the sustainability of the results beyond the lifetime of the TAP and BOTA. A formal alumni group (in addition to the normal informal feedback from grantees) can add enormous value at relatively low cost by travelling in a structured and systematic way to not only their own communities but also others that TAP wishes to target, and by keeping in touch with each other as they move through life as a cohort.

## References

Bornstein, A., (2009), 'Analysis of Tuition Assistance Applications', mimeo.

BOTA (2011), 'Conditional Cash Transfer Implementation Manual, 10 May 2011.'

OECD (2007), Reviews of National Policies for Education: Higher Education in Kazakhstan, OECD/World Bank, 2007

## Annex A Question matrix

**Table A.1 Key questions for TAP (from evaluation plan)**

Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the programme address the reasons why students are not in higher education, i.e. is a lack of funding the main issue?</li> <li>Does the TAP enable students to go to their desired place of learning?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do higher education institutions need more students?</li> <li>Did institutions have difficulties with encouraging poor students to apply?</li> <li>Does the government consider the scheme relevant to its national policies?</li> </ul>
Effectiveness	<p>On outreach and advertising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do students and institutions find out about the scheme?</li> <li>How widely known is it? Is it known to school teachers and university administrators?</li> </ul>
	<p>On targeting and selection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the TAP effectively reach the poorest potential students?</li> <li>Are the criteria for selection clear, publicised and adhered to?</li> <li>What works well and what are the challenges with the application process?</li> <li>How long does it take for an application to be approved?</li> <li>Is the decision making transparent?</li> <li>Is the feedback timely?</li> <li>What are the reasons for children from poor families for not applying to TAP?</li> </ul>
	<p>On implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What type of support do students receive? How effective is this support?</li> <li>Why do some successful candidates withdraw from the programme, either before or during their course?</li> <li>How effective are the monitoring and evaluation arrangements?</li> </ul>
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are payments made, and how often? Do they come on time?</li> <li>What is the length of time between application and receipt of funds?</li> <li>What is the cost to the student of applying for the grant?</li> </ul>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How much do students spend on their education? Is this covered by the grant?</li> <li>If the funding were to cease, how would students continue their studies?</li> </ul>
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceptions of improvements in academic performance, knowledge and skills</li> <li>Perceived benefits and challenges with the community service component of the grant</li> <li>Perceptions of the usefulness of the training</li> <li>Has the grant brought about any changes in social relations, particularly for students from residential institutions?</li> </ul>

## Annex B Fieldwork conducted

**Table B.1 List of interviews and focus groups conducted**

N	Status respondent	of	Location (respondents' home residence)	Rural / urban	Oblast respondents' place study/work	of Enrolment round	Current status
2	Students , Selected		Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2009	Still enrolled, receiving
2	Students, Selected,		Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2010	Still enrolled, receiving
3	Students, Selected,		Akmola	Rural	Astana	2010	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Akmola	Urban	Astana	2010	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		EKO	Rural	Semei	2010	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		EKO	Rural	Uralsk	2011	Still enrolled, receiving
2	Students, selected		SKO	Urban	Shymkent	2009, 2010	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		SKO	Rural	Shymkent	2010	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Kyzylordinskaya	Rural	Astana	2011	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Zhambylskaya	Urban	Almaty	2010	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Rejected applicant		Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2010	
1	Rejected applicant		Akmola	Rural	Akmola	2010	
1	Rejected applicant		SKO	Urban	Shymkent	2010	
1	Rejected applicant		Zhambylskaya	Rural	Zhambylskaya	2011	
1	Rejected applicant		WKO	Urban	Astana	2011	
1	Non-applicant		Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2010	
2	Non-applicants		Akmola	Rural	Akmola	2011	
1	Parent		Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2010	
1	Parent		WKO	Urban	Uralsk	2011	
3	Parents		SKO	Urban	Shymkent	2010, 2011	
1	Teacher		Zhambylskaya	Rural	Zhambylskaya	2010	
1	Teacher		Astana	Urban	Astana	2010-2011	
2	Teachers		SKO	Rural	SKO	2009-2011	

1	Teacher	SKO	Urban	Shymkent	2010-2011
1	Academic	Astana	Urban	Astana	2010-2011
1	Academic	Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2010-2011
1	Academic	SKO	Rural	SKO	
2	Local Authorities	Astana	Urban	Astana	2010, 2011
2	NGOs	WKO, SKO	Rural and Urban	WKO, SKO	2009-2011
1	Relative	Akmola	Rural	Akmola	2011
2	FGD with 2 groups grade 11 students (25 students)	SKO	Rural and Urban	Shymkent and SKO	
1	Consultation with 1 College 11 <sup>th</sup> grade class (20 students)	SKO	Rural	SKO	
6	BOTA Staff	Almaty			

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