



Oxford Policy Management

KAZAKHSTAN: EXTERNAL EVALUATION, BOTA PROGRAMS

Qualitative Assessment of the Tuition Assistance Programme

Report from the second round of the evaluation

Joanna Rogers

November 2012

Acknowledgements

This assessment is based on qualitative fieldwork and analysis conducted by Tata Chanturidze, Daulet Serikbay and Joanna Rogers. Many thanks to all the interviewees involved in this.

This report has benefitted from comments from Ian MacAuslan and Clare O'Brien of Oxford Policy Management. Clare has also been instrumental in providing advice and assistance throughout the assessment process, and is managing the overall BOTA external evaluation.

Special thanks go to the BOTA Tuition Assistance Programme (TAP) and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) teams for providing the necessary data and information on the programme, and for their time spent in discussions with the evaluation team.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	1
List of tables	ii
Abbreviations	iii
1 Assessment context	1
1.1 Purpose and objectives	1
1.2 Methodology	1
1.3 Introduction to the TAP	2
1.4 Report structure	3
2 Results from fieldwork	4
2.1 Relevance	4
2.2 Effectiveness	11
2.3 Efficiency	17
2.4 Outcomes and impact	19
2.5 Sustainability	24
3 Conclusions and recommendations	25
3.1 Summary conclusions	25
3.2 Recommendations for the TAP	27
References	30
Annex A Question matrix	31
Annex B Fieldwork conducted	32

List of tables

Table 1.1	TAP interviews	2
Table 1.2	Data on grant applications and grants awarded	3
Table 2.1	What have you done since graduating? Responses of 11 TAP graduates	10
Table A.1	Key questions for TAP (from evaluation plan)	31
Table B.1	List of interviews conducted	32

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

1.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this report is to provide independent qualitative feedback on the processes and impacts of the BOTA tuition assistance programme (TAP). This second round of the TAP evaluation adds to and deepens the feedback provided in the first round (see Rogers *et al.*, 2011)..

The first round of the assessment in November 2011 focused mainly on the operational aspects of the TAP such as applicants' experiences of the selection process. Conclusions and recommendations were offered in the context of the changes that BOTA was making to the TAP, including its focus on committing funding for short courses of two years or less in the 2012 intake, which contrasted with the four-year courses that it had funded until that point. At the time of the first assessment round it was not possible to make any substantive comments on the longer-term effect of the programme since only four TAP grantees had graduated. However, in 2012 another 22 grantees from the 2009 intake graduated.

For this second round of the assessment the main focus of the interviews has therefore been twofold: first, the experience of the 2012 intake going through the new rules for the TAP; and second, questions of sustainability and impact, as well as operations, so far as they can be assessed through interviews with TAP graduates. Given that the TAP has now completed its last grant round, this assessment focuses on its relevance and effectiveness in achieving the programme's overall objectives and specifically the objective of the TAP 'to break the cycle of poverty among [grantees] by providing young people from low income households with the opportunity to acquire an education'.¹

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 consider options for the TAP as it plans for the eventual closure of its programme after 2014. 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.

1.2 Methodology

Face to face interviews were conducted in September and October 2012 in Almaty, Almatinskaya oblast, Astana and Akmolinskaya oblast. All other interviews were conducted by telephone with respondents from a number of other oblasts, particularly those that were targeted by the TAP team for enrolment in 2012 such as Aktyubinskaya and Mangystauskaya, but also those where the 2011 and 2012 graduates are located including: West Kazakhstan oblast, East Kazakhstan oblast, Zhambylskaya, Kyzylordinskaya and South Kazakhstan oblast. Key informants from the academic community were also interviewed and a short discussion was held with the BOTA team responsible for implementing TAP. The TAP was also the subject of discussion at two national level key informant interviews with representatives of UNICEF and the World Bank. In total, the interview results, conclusions and recommendations in this report are drawn from 43 interviews including: successful and unsuccessful applicants to the 2012 round, graduates who completed their studies in 2011 and 2012, and university administrators that supported the dissemination of TAP application forms on behalf of BOTA.

¹ Tuition Assistance Programme 2012 Implementation Strategy, provided by BOTA TAP team (mimeo)

Table 1.1 below provides a breakdown of the respondents 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.

Table 1.1 TAP interviews

	Astana city and oblast	Almaty city and oblast	Aktubinskaya	Other oblasts (1)	National stakeholders	Total
Interviews with applicants						
Successful applicants 2012						
University	2	2	3	1		8
College	2	2	2	2		8
Unsuccessful applicants 2012						
University	1	3		1		5
College	1	2				3
Interviews with graduates	2	3		6		11
Interviews with key informants						
University or College administrators or teachers or NGOs	2	1	2	1		6
Multilateral organisations					2	2
Total	10	13	7	11	2	43

Source: OPM. Note: (1) East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan, South Kazakhstan, Mangystau, Kyzylordinskaya and Zhambylskaya oblasts

1.3 Introduction to the TAP

The TAP targets young people from the poorest 30% of households in Kazakhstan. Up to, and including, the third call for applicants, which closed at the end of March 2011, 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 Kazakhstan citizen, graduated or about to graduate from 11th 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; 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 to confirm the means test.

In the 2012 round, the TAP targeted the same demographic of young people from the poorest 30% of households in Kazakhstan, and the same staged application process applied, but additional application criteria were applied. Applicants had to either:

- be in their 11th year at school and willing to apply to a two-year college course. Applicants were given a list of BOTA-approved colleges to which they could apply;
- be in their penultimate or final year at university and with a good academic performance (A and B grades only) and experiencing financial hardship; or
- have dropped out of their penultimate or final year of university for financial reasons.

Only a few applicants, and none of the successful grantees, from the fourth round were from the latter category.

Table 1.2 summarises some of the features and results of the grant rounds held to date:

Table 1.2 Data on grant applications and grants awarded

Data on grant applications and grants awarded	2009	2010	2011	2012 ¹	Total 4 years
Number of technically eligible applications, entered into MIS	1444	1923	2136	2238	7741
% of applicants choosing university	96%	94%	93%	72%	89%
% of applicants choosing college	4%	6%	7%	28%	11%
% of female applicants	66%	68%	65%	71%	68%
% of male applicants	34%	32%	35%	30%	33%
Number of grants awarded	87	234	328	189	838
Number of applicants per awarded grant	17:1	8:1	7:1	12:1	9:1

Source: BOTA M&E report September 2012, TAP team data, authors' calculations. Note: (1) In 2012 applicants from schools could only choose college; applicants for university had to be already in their penultimate or final year of a university course so they did not 'choose' university, but were applicants to the university component of the scheme.

1.4 Report structure

Section 2 of this report presents results of the fieldwork under the following headings:

1. Relevance
2. Effectiveness and efficiency
3. Outcomes and impact
4. Sustainability

The results are presented in relation to the new intake of students from the 2012 round and to the graduates from previous rounds. This means that some parts of section two draw more heavily on responses from the 2012 applicants than others – many of the respondents had not, for example, received their grants yet at the time of the interviews and could therefore provide feedback mainly on the application and selection process. Responses from graduates are relevant through all sections. The results presented here do not repeat the findings reported in the November 2011 assessment, but may refer to relevant areas of the 2011 assessment and highlight areas of concurrence or difference with the 2012 round as appropriate.

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

2 Results from fieldwork

2.1 Relevance

The 2011 assessment concluded that the TAP, in its previous form, was relevant in addressing lack of funding as one of the main barriers preventing young people from low income households from achieving higher education. It documented that the grant recipients felt a transformational impact from becoming a TAP grantee and that rejected applicants or those who had never applied, express a heightened sense of unfairness or dissatisfaction about the BOTA TAP. The first round assessment also confirmed that the TAP fits into and complements the government programmes and policies in higher education. One respondent in this round of interviews expressed the view that the TAP is focused on a slightly different segment of the education sector to the government programmes:

All children in Kazakhstan have the possibility to get Government scholarships if they study well. If they don't show a strong academic performance, they are excluded from Government fellowships. BOTA is less strict about academic grades. It means BOTA gives funding to the poorest who are not the best in their performance, but are good enough to pass TAP requirements. (NGO key informant)

This view of the BOTA TAP seems also to raise a question about how relevant the TAP is given the extensive Government grant programme which is open to all, including the poorest students. It does not however acknowledge the inequalities that poverty introduces into the ability of children to 'study well' or, as one respondent stated:

...it is very difficult for poor students to compete with rich children
(TAP graduate 2012)

Other key informants, however, confirm the views of respondents reported in the 2011 report about lack of funding being a major barrier to educational achievement for students from low income households:

The [BOTA TAP] programme helps such children very well. It is a system of charity and support for many families and supplements the state policies of Kazakhstan. (NGO key informant)

We have 1174 full-time students, of which about 900 are supported by budgetary grants and the rest are paying, including two BOTA TAP and Bobek fund grantees. I wish more villages in Akmola oblast became target groups of BOTA so that we could accept more students from there. (College administrator, key informant)

BOTA support is similar to other scholarship schemes, but if it was done in a larger scale, children from poorer families would prefer to apply to BOTA, as it is easier to get it. (NGO key informant)

One multilateral organisation respondent characterised the TAP as an *'interesting programme as it targets less privileged families and offers young students a very good chance...The government offers merit-based scholarships that generally go to better off families. They go to better schools and have a better environment.'*

Given the change in focus and the constraints imposed in the 2012 round, the discussion in this section focuses more on the question of how respondents perceive the relevance of the 2012 TAP

parameters, rather than the relevance of TAP as a whole within the wider context of education policy and programmes in Kazakhstan. We also assess the relevance of the TAP as perceived by TAP grantee graduates who have completed their education and are in the process of entering employment.

2.1.1 TAP eligibility criteria and target groups

The decision to offer tuition assistance to 11th-grade students for two-year college courses at specified colleges and to third- or fourth-year university students was driven by internal BOTA administrative needs and not by external factors. The respondents to this round of the assessment report differing perspectives on the relevance of these criteria depending on the two different categories of applicants.

College applicants and grantees

The sharp increase in the numbers of applicants to college places compared to the previous three years of the TAP (see Table 1.2 above) illustrates that when 11th-grade students had a choice in the 2009, 2010 and 2011 TAP rounds, they overwhelmingly chose to apply to university rather than college. The fourfold increase in the share of TAP applicants applying to college after 11th grade (from 7% up to 28%) is a reflection of the new BOTA rules and the TAP aim to award college as well as university grants and not a reflection of the choice of applicants.

Some applicants applied to go to college because that was the only option open to them through the BOTA TAP in 2012 and they express some dissatisfaction with this choice. Even where they have been awarded a TAP grant and are happy with the award, they experience some ambivalence:

I would have applied to university if I had been a 2011 graduate last year, but I had to apply to college this year because BOTA strangely would fund mainly college students. Last year, two graduates of our boarding school got into university with TAP grants, but I ended up in college this year. I still don't understand the rationale. I was happy to hear the news that I won a grant but was a bit disappointed to discover that I could only go to college with that grant. I was hoping to be a university student. But I was given a privilege to pick a specialty of my choice, so I agreed because it was not a bad deal. (Successful college applicant, Almaty)

Some NGO key informants confirm this ambivalence is widespread among applicants to the 2012 round:

...college applicants do not study well; but those who stay till 11th grade are better, but they do not have the choice to apply to Universities because TAP no longer gives full grants for universities, and they choose college without wanting to study there. (NGO key informant)

Some applicants, however, are satisfied with their choices, even if not their first choice, as attending college represents a chance to continue with higher education and still represents a possible path to subsequently go to university:

I still think I'll study in the university after I graduate from the college (Successful college applicant, Zhambylskaya)

I made a decision to go to this college because TAP funding became available, and because I always wanted to learn accounting. (Successful college applicant, Aktubinskaya)

I was not interested in going to university. First, I want to finish college and maybe apply to university later. In the list of colleges offered by BOTA, I picked the one located ... closest to our home because my father didn't want me to go far away from home. It was both my father's and TAP's influence in selecting my current college. (Successful college applicant, Akmola)

TAP increased my desire to study further. But I felt I was less prepared for university with school knowledge, so I chose college. TAP accelerated my decision to go to college. (Successful college applicant, Almatinskaya)

College courses can be two, three or four years long, but the application of the time constraints on the BOTA programme meant that TAP applicants could only apply for two year college courses which even further limited their choices.

I was considering applying to a college with more than 2 years of study, but had to choose my current college because the length of its course doesn't exceed 2 years (1 year and 10 months), according to TAP requirements in my agreement with BOTA. The Polytechnic college I wanted to go to had 3-year programs, but that didn't match TAP requirements. (Successful college applicant, Akmola)

BOTA said we have to choose a college where we can study for two years. Most of the colleges give 3 -4 year education. This college was the only one where I could apply in my Oblast. I would like BOTA to extend its support beyond two years. In that case a lot of my friends would apply to TAP (Successful college applicant, West Kazakhstan)

I chose my specialty of my own choice before I learned about TAP... none of the six colleges with 2-year programmes suggested by BOTA was a good match with my intended specialty. All the colleges training primary school teachers that I know have 3-year programs. I would definitely have gone to university if TAP had been given to university applicants, but I was OK with college as well. ... Colleges themselves had their own requirements. TAP-grantees in state colleges are considered self-paying students not supported by governmental grants. This year many colleges did not accept 'non-budgetary' students, they accepted primarily applicants who had won governmental grants due to high scores on the Unified National Test. So there was a conflict of requirements stipulated by both BOTA and colleges. I had a difficult time trying to remedy this mismatch problem. (Unsuccessful college applicant, Astana)

The TAP rules attempted to mitigate the constraints imposed on applicant choices in the 2012 round by directing candidates towards higher quality educational institutions that help to increase the chances of employability after college. The TAP team used a Ministry of Education list of the best educational institutions from 2010 as the basis for its list of preferred institutions based on an annual competition run by the Department of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) where college graduates are assessed by their employers. Unfortunately, however, changes to the

education system during the summer of 2012 meant that many of these choices were no longer available to TAP applicants at the point when their application was being approved as some of the colleges on the BOTA list were closed by the Government in an attempt to streamline the college education system and raise standards.

The TAP team expands on how and why the colleges were chosen for the BOTA preferred list and clarifies how the decision of the Government affected the choice of TAP applicants:

TAP preferred colleges with two years courses due to the Board of Trustee decision made in autumn 2011. The list of recommended colleges during the 2012 enrolment campaign was wider than Ministry of Education & Science' list of the leading colleges. TAP was trying to cover all regions. The colleges were chosen on the length of courses (no more than 2 years) and variety of specialties. TAP was trying find the colleges with most popular specialties like technical, agribusiness, IT, pedagogical, medical, etc.

TAP staff did not know about the MES decision before the recruitment campaign began, it was not announced widely. MES officials said that they did not close colleges, they just recommended to their administration, a change in their judicial status. But in fact there was no enrollment into colleges attached to Universities in 2012 . (TAP team comments)

Respondents from NGOs that supported the BOTA application process in 2012 have mixed views both about the target groups for the 2012 round and the list of preferred BOTA colleges:

In our region many school students want to study at university and not in colleges and therefore when we were supporting the application process for TAP we often received refusals. 9th grade [sic] students in 2012 were only offered colleges. The list of colleges for school leavers in our region needs to be expanded to include local community colleges then there would be more interest. School students from low income families don't have the means to travel to other towns. (NGO key informant)

This change is a big problem for children from poor families. Firstly, colleges selected by BOTA (to be applied though TAP fellowship) are not the best colleges, and are located in villages. Children from cities ... do not want to go there to study. Also graduates of these poor colleges are not employed afterwards. I know few of these examples. BOTA should revise the list of colleges where TAP applicants can study and include better ones. (NGO key informant)

University applicants and grantees

As with the 2011 assessment, many respondents who had applied to the university strand of the 2012 TAP round are from large families with five or more children and cite the large number of other children in the family to be educated as the reason for financial difficulties in paying for education. Overall, nearly all of the university students interviewed refer to financial difficulties challenging their ability to pay for their studies and the relevance, therefore, of the BOTA TAP in supporting them in their final years of study:

I was considering to take a break in the University as my family was not able to pay for my education, and when I was told about Tap, I

thought that I should apply! (Successful 3rd year university applicant, Zhambylskaya)

I had difficulties paying my tuition and to make it easier for my parents I applied for TAP. (Successful 4th year university applicant, Akmola)

I was working to pay for my education on my own. Parents didn't help me. (Unsuccessful 4th year university applicant, Almaty)

Sometimes I have trouble finding money to pay for my education, although I usually manage to pay despite hardship....In 2010, I applied for a governmental grant but failed. (Unsuccessful 3rd year university applicant, Astana)

Most also demonstrate that they had clear strategies for addressing these financial challenges including loans, sponsors, support from parents and relatives and part-time employment.

I come from a family with five children. I am the oldest. Three of the children are currently students, one more little brother is about graduate from high school. None of them can afford their education on their own. I struggled a lot, had to work (for Oriflame and as a private language teacher). I considered studying part-time. (Successful 4th year university applicant, Almaty)

It was hard to pay for education. I borrowed a student loan from Alliance Bank. It was one of three banks with the lowest interest rate. I was eligible for the loan due to my social status: my parents are divorced. To make it easier for me to pay a 1-million tenge loan instead of 2 million, I applied for the TAP grant. (Successful 3rd year university applicant, Almaty)

All unsuccessful applicants interviewed report that they are continuing with their final or penultimate year without a TAP grant:

I am still studying at university ... and will look for part-time work, if necessary. I am not considering other opportunities with other grant programs due to the TAP experience: failure just because of one bad grade. (Unsuccessful 3rd year university applicant, Astana)

This raises the question of whether the successful grantees from the 2012 round would have completed their studies anyway and that TAP is therefore a nice bonus for these students, enabling them to give up part time jobs or reduce the burden of debt on their families, but not essential for ensuring the completion of their studies as they are highly motivated and so close to completing anyway. The impact of the TAP in these cases is one of poverty alleviation for the student or the household as a whole, rather than specifically improving educational opportunities and outcomes. It seems probable that, like the unsuccessful applicants, many of the successful applicants interviewed would have completed their course of study successfully without the BOTA TAP intervention, but with ongoing negative implications for the economic status of their families:

My family would try to somehow get money for my education from bank loans or other sources, but it would put them in difficulties (Successful 4th year university applicant, Aktubinskaya)

[If I had not won the grant] I would have continued taking out loans from AllianceBank at the same interest rate since my grades allowed me to keep borrowing additional money. I was a straight A student at the time. My lowest grade for a course was 95 out of 100. By other criteria, I was doing well too. (Successful 3rd year university applicant, Almaty)

... If I had not won the grant I would have had to go back to working. (Successful 4th year university applicant, Almaty)

I would have continued with my studies regardless of whether I got the grant or not as I am in my last year and I am a good student. (Successful 4th year university applicant, Aktyubinskaya)

The TAP team emphasises that it is probably more accurate to say that these applicants

... 'would have tried to complete their course of study', because otherwise the difficulties are underestimated: high interest rates on student and other loans; lack of sponsors; low support from parents and relatives and also lack of places for part-time employment for students (TAP team comments)

Summary – college and university applicants to the TAP 2012 round

Overall the responses to this round of interviews raise questions about the extent to which the TAP grants that were awarded in 2012 are as relevant to the grantees as those that were able to support greater choice and greater opportunity for low income students in the 2009-2011 rounds.

The almost unequivocal endorsement by nearly all respondents of the relevance of the TAP that emerged from the November 2011 assessment is not entirely echoed among the applicants and key informants involved in the 2012 round. Many questions have emerged about whether the strategy of pushing 11th grade students to choose two-year college courses and directing their choice of college and course, albeit with the best of intentions, has been the most constructive and relevant way to address the barriers to education for young people from low income households. On the other hand, many respondents acknowledge the huge importance of providing any opportunity that can help students from low income families into college. College applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, are mainly positive about the opportunity that the BOTA TAP offers, but their enthusiasm is more muted than that of the TAP grantees of previous rounds as reported in the 2011 assessment.

Respondents are more positive about the relevance of the 2012 TAP round for university applicants than for college students, but questions do emerge about whether the intervention is as relevant, in terms of improving educational outcomes as opposed to more generally alleviating poverty, for university students who would probably have completed their course of study anyway as it was for the grantees from the previous round who might otherwise not have gone to university at all. These questions are explored further below in the outcomes and impact section of this report.

2.1.2 Graduates

The central theory of change inherent in the TAP is that access to higher education will increase employability and help young people from low income families break out of the cycle of poverty. The respondents in the 2011 assessment clearly indicated their opinion that a college education increases the chances of getting a job that isn't manual or heavy labour and a university education increases the chances of getting a better job. An additional nuance that has emerged from the interviews undertaken for this assessment is that some respondents have mentioned that a

master's degree helps to ensure the chances of an even better job – for example as a teacher in a college or university rather than only in a school. The first small cohort of 26 graduates from the 2009 and 2010 TAP rounds has come through in 2012 which represents the first opportunity to evaluate this theory of change, if only in a small way. These first TAP graduates are either:

- University students who had gone from college straight to the second year of a four year university course, or;
- College students who have completed a two or three year course

Eleven graduates have been interviewed for this assessment of which four are university graduates and seven are college graduates. Table 2.1 presents a brief overview of the immediate short-term outcomes for these graduates:

Table 2.1 What have you done since graduating? Responses of 11 TAP graduates

	College		University	Total
	2011	2012	2012	
Employment or internship commensurate with qualification achieved through TAP grant		2	3	5
Other employment or internship	1			1
Studying at university full-time or correspondence course following college		2		2
Housewife and mother		1		1
Unemployed	1	1		2
Total	2	6	3	11

Source: OPM.

This small sample of the first TAP graduates cannot be considered to be representative or predictive in any way of the post-graduation outcomes for future cohorts as it is both too small and too heavily oriented on those who have completed college courses either before entering university or as their only qualification. Nearly all those interviewed had only graduated in the summer of 2012 so had not been seeking employment for very long. While only five respondents report having entered employment commensurate with their qualifications, it is nevertheless encouraging for the TAP theory of change that the tendency so far is towards employment, further education and work in the home than unemployment. Bearing in mind the discussions above about the relevance of college education, it is also interesting to note that 'better' employment in this small sample clearly sits with the university graduates rather than the college graduates, and that these are university graduates who have come to university through the college route. This observation confirms that a college education can help to lead to better employment, as it is one of the routes into a university education that is more likely to secure better education.

The TAP team adds that,

This is in line with general situation in Kazakhstan – the number of University students number is bigger, and their employment is higher. A new initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science is coming about encouraging the local and international companies to invest into technical schools and TVET students; a new system of National Qualification System and Professional Standards is in process of

being created in cooperation with state and private entrepreneurs' Associations. The President of Kazakhstan also encourages companies to support a so-called 'dual system' of learning – partly in technical school and partly working at any (small, medium and large) enterprises. The years 2013-2015 are seen as a pilot period.'

Given that the overall employment rate in Kazakhstan is apparently relatively high, with only 6.6% of the labour force unemployed in 2009, the important issue for TAP graduates appears to be finding better work, not just work (World Bank, 2012). An analysis of national household survey data might reveal whether the employment outcomes for recent TAP graduates are stronger than for those of their peers coming from similar levels of household poverty.

2.2 Effectiveness

2.2.1 Outreach and information

The issue of outreach and advertising was dealt with comprehensively in the 2011 assessment. Some of the issues highlighted then still hold true: nearly all respondents involved in the 2012 application round, for example, preferred paper application formats to online applications. Although some said they preferred online application processes, they had used paper applications as they had been given them. The TAP team has consistently been sensitive to these issues and has followed up on recommendations from the first-round report particularly with regard to ensuring as far as possible greater equity of access to the TAP during the 2012 round and ensuring a clear information campaign to communicate the changes to the TAP rules. Measures noted during this assessment include²:

- A more systematic outreach approach for under-represented oblasts:
 - This year TAP not just visited oblast centers but in each of the 6 targeted oblasts, visited 2 rayon centers. These visits helped to reach more people who live in villages. Also we met with school, college and university heads and explained new strategy of TAP 2012. Plus TAP team identified one TAP grantee from each oblast who are the strongest TAP recipients studying in Almaty from different regions of Kazakhstan and trained them. These students during their winter holidays in their oblasts delivered presentation in 1-3 schools for the students of 11th grades' (TAP team member)
- Using official Ministry of Education channels to communicate the changes to the TAP criteria and eligibility rules. Whether this approach meant that the formal channels of communication worked or not, it does mean that an equitable approach was taken for all oblasts by the TAP team.
- More structured guidance for TAP NGO and school partners in the regions about their role in the promotion of the programme and the level of assistance they can offer to 11th grade school applicants and university applicants during the preparation of applications.

The information campaign appears to have been largely successful, with nearly all respondents reporting that they were clear about the TAP rules, eligibility criteria and target groups for the 2012 round. The guidance for universities about their role in the preparation phase of the applications may have been less structured than for the NGO, school and other regional partners as the university applicants report a lot of support in some cases:

² Mainly drawn from the Tuition Assistance Programme 2012 Implementation Strategy, provided by BOTA TAP team (mimeo)

I filled in the application with my university teachers... the university covered all expenses... all information was provided by the university. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

My thesis supervisor [Deputy Dean of the Law Department], a good, kind and responsive person, advised me that I apply for the TAP as she was aware of my financial issues.'... 'First time it was when she showed me a folder with all the information and requisites of BOTA, number and link to the web-site. Second time, the staff of the dean's office told me about TAP once again and that they needed my personal information to include me in the list of potential candidates. (Successful university applicant, Akmolai)

And little support in others:

I received an envelope with the application form at the dean's office and having filled them in, I sent them by post. (Successful university applicant, Zhambylskaya)

2.2.2 Targeting

Targeting in the 2012 round was largely focused on reaching specific target groups of potential applicants in universities and 11th grade of school. The TAP programme took a decision to focus the targeting exercise even more closely on universities that meet certain standards both in terms of the education and qualifications they offer their students and other education services. Criteria included³:

- availability of dormitories, dining facilities, tuition fee discounts;
- national institutional accreditation and specialized accreditation from foreign accreditation agencies; and
- high ranks in the national and international (eg. Thomson Reuters, Quacquarelli Symonds Ltd, etc.) rankings of 2010 and 2011.

As with previous rounds, the proxy means test administered as part of the application process formed the basis of ensuring that the poorest students were being targeted. Respondents report a range of perceptions about whether the TAP reached the poorest and most needy students during this round:

My course-mate applied too, but she wasn't successful at the very beginning. I think it is fair that she didn't receive the grant, because both of her parents work, and her living conditions were decent. (Successful university applicant, Almaty)

... in our faculty, together with me, five other people applied and only three of these received the grant. Those who along with me were awarded the grant don't really need it and it seemed to me that the two who weren't successful have a greater need and I felt hurt on their behalf. (Successful university applicant, Zhambylskaya)

...I know eleven other people who applied to TAP, out of them seven were invited to interview, and only three were successful,

³ Tuition Assistance Programme 2012 Implementation Strategy, provided by BOTA TAP team (mimeo)

those, who were the most poor and better. (Successful college applicant, Aktyubinskaya)

Both of my classmates who applied to TAP don't have fathers. Their families are not financially stable. But I think they were unsuccessful. Results were not published. I was surprised at the results. I can't really imagine the real reason. Even though they were better pupils in school than I was, they scored less on the Unified National Testing. Maybe that was the reason they were unsuccessful. (Successful college applicant, Akmola)

I know only one girl who actually deserves the TAP grant. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Astana)

I know three students who were most in need and got TAP grants (Successful university applicant, Aktyubinskaya)

My classmate was not successful because her economic conditions were decent, and relatives and siblings were employed (Successful college applicant, Almatinskaya)

I needed it a lot, as I said we are seven children in the family, with only one parent, but I was not granted the TAP fellowship. In addition, I know a student who applied for the TAP, she is not from a large family, and does not have financial problems, and she was accepted by BOTA to TAP. I think this was not correct decision and not fair to me (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

Others only know of applicants from previous rounds:

I heard from my course-mate that her aunt's student received a TAP grant before 2012 undeservingly by today's criteria (bad academic performance). That was the reason I applied and gave a try. I heard of another person who was academically successful but not really needy, but still received the grant. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

I personally know two girls with disabilities (my sister's friends) from my village. Both did well academically in school, received TAP grants under former requirements and went to study in Almaty. I think they deserved TAP because they really want to study. They need education to survive and live a decent life. Studying and working will help them to realize their dreams. (Unsuccessful college applicant, Astana)

Respondents also raise questions about whether those who are most academically able have been awarded the grants. While it is clear that these respondents are not offering unbiased and objective opinions about the fairness of the TAP targeting and selection process, it is important to note the range of perceptions and the way in which they are expressed. It is not only offended unsuccessful applicants who report a perception that not necessarily those most in need who were awarded the grant. The question of perception of fairness and whether the grants have been awarded to those most in need is discussed further in the sections on sustainability and the conclusions of this report.

2.2.3 The application process

Overall, the application process continues to be considered straightforward, clear and acceptable by successful and unsuccessful applicants (though largely based on accounts from successful applicants). This section presents only a few points that emerged as distinctive from or particularly reinforcing the findings from the first round of the evaluation. Most of the findings are drawn from the 2012 applicants. Regarding the graduates from earlier years, all those interviewed had entered the TAP programme in either 2009 or 2010 and their experience of outreach, the application process and of targeting largely echoes the experiences of the successful applicants reported previously.

The interview

The interview continues to be raised as an issue, particularly, but not only, by unsuccessful applicants. In particular some respondents feel that it is too short and therefore possibly superficial:

I would give 0 points to the interview process. It lasted only three minutes. I still don't know the exact reason why I was rejected... (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

Interview lasted only 5 minutes or so, it was too short. The first question asked by an interviewer was whether I had low grades [threes]. She informed me that according to the changes to the TAP selection rules, university applicants with low grades have no or little chance to receive the TAP grant. There were a couple more questions. I liked the interview process, although I expected something different: instead of a large formal commission, there were only three interviewers speaking rather informally. I had prepared well to show myself off in a good way, but didn't have a chance. I was upset by the outcome. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Astana)

The interview lasted 10 minutes. One question was improper, I think. For example, one of the interviewers asked if I could get pregnant again and if that would inhibit my education. I answered accordingly that I had already taken birth control measures (intrauterine device) and nobody knows ahead of time what would happen in the future in such cases. I said I left my child in the village to come to Astana to study... I think asking questions is a good idea but grading candidates' answers and making decision with regard to family outcome relying purely on such answers is not correct, I think. (Unsuccessful college applicant, Astana)

Others, even unsuccessful applicants, feel that the process is important and fair:

I think that the interview was a right thing. The first question I was asked was whether I had low grades [threes]. After that, I was told I cannot be interviewed any more due to this condition. Overall ... I think it was fair. I only applied to university grants, and I think that BOTA application process was far better. Every person was treated well, there is an individualized approach. I would reapply if I were a third- or second-year student. I would try to eliminate my low grade by redoing the university course. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

I think the interview is a good way of checking the facts given in the application. It is also a chance for applicants to demonstrate their achievements. (Successful college applicant, Akmola)

I think the interview process was fair because interviewers should be able to ask questions they asked, so that they can hear answers from applicants themselves. I could talk about my plans and aspirations. (Successful college applicant, Almatinskaya)

I believe having an interview stage is fair and is a good thing because they spend so much money on potential grantees. This money must be justified with thorough selection of best applicants. (Successful college applicant, Almaty)

During the interview, they wanted to know the potential of the candidate, they were trying to figure out whether they should be giving a grant to a certain student, whether he/she really is in need. And they asked a few questions to check my intellectual aptitude. ... I think it is right to ask such questions to learn if a person is a good match for the programme and not lose money for no reason. (Successful university applicant, Akmola)

On the whole it is the unsuccessful applicants who are critical of the interview process and the successful applicants who express satisfaction with the way it is conducted, understand why it is needed and find it a valuable and interesting experience. It is worth noting that these assessments of the TAP have interviewed many fewer unsuccessful applicants than successful applicants so the sample is significantly unrepresentative for unsuccessful applicants.

Decision-making and feedback

Respondents are overall satisfied with their interaction with BOTA TAP staff during the application process finding it 'helpful' and making the application process 'easier'. Almost the only area, apart from those mentioned above, where respondents would like to see improvements is in the delays in feedback between the various stages of the application process and in particular the final notification that comes so close to the beginning of the academic year.

I think BOTA should inform TAP recipients on time that they were selected ... I was informed about involvement in TAP in September, when the students were already in the college. This delay caused problems... I would ask BOTA to think about managing delays; everything else is very good (Successful college applicant, Aktubinskaya)

I didn't like the fact that BOTA did not inform me about my unsuccessful result until the very last day. ... I was reluctant to call them repeatedly in the end, fearing they would reproach me for annoyance. I had to ask someone else to ask BOTA about my results on my behalf. BOTA themselves were supposed to inform me of the results. Their behaviour made me finally phone them on 25 August to know the result. I was very upset because at BOTA's advice I had been looking for colleges until 20 August. (Unsuccessful college applicant, Astana)

...in late August I was told I got a fellowship (Successful college applicant, West Kazakhstan)

The entire application lasted from March to interview in June to announcement of results in late August. (Successful college applicant, Akmola)

I called them at the end of August to learn about the outcome of the application (Successful university applicant, Almatinskaya)

The late communication of the TAP selection process, particularly for those candidates who were college candidates and had been encouraged to identify and contact colleges in order to start their courses in September, understandably causes problems for applicants. This is a situation that exacerbates their dissatisfaction with the process if they are unsuccessful. Some suggestions are offered below on how the feedback process could be managed more effectively in order to minimise the inconvenience to both successful and unsuccessful candidates.

Rejected applicants

The TAP team has tried to give more information to rejected applicants on reasons for rejection following the November 2011 assessment. The respondents in this round of interviews, however, continue to echo first round respondents in their dissatisfaction with the rejection process:

I still don't know the actual reason for rejection. But I learned from my sister that BOTA said that the reason for rejection was that I had "enough money" for my studies. I suppose my husband's income of 60,000T was the basis for such decision. But they probably didn't take into account that we pay 40,000T for rent, remit 10,000T to our child in the village and we are left with the remaining 10,000T, which is definitely not enough. We cannot save enough. I'm not sure whether the outcome is just: grades for my answers during the interview might have prevailed over the actual financial condition of my family. The actual breakdown of our monthly expenses should have been taken into consideration not just the bare numbers of income and interview. (Unsuccessful college applicant, Astana)

Unfortunately, I haven't been told the reason why I was refused and I think this is rude and unfair. I think they should have explained to me the reason why I didn't get through. I haven't tried to find out as I was too upset with this failure. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

Somebody from BOTA called me and said I was not selected, but they did not say why it happened. I think people deserve better treatment from BOTA, they have right to know why they were rejected. This is something BOTA needs to improve (Unsuccessful college applicant, Almatinskaya)

The unsuccessful respondents in this round of the assessment had all reached, but failed, the interview stage of the application process and their dissatisfaction may therefore be disproportionately great as they had invested so much time and hope in their application. The TAP staff may well have given reasons for the rejections by phone, but nevertheless respondents do not perceive the reasons as having been clearly given. Some respondents appear to think that they were rejected because they had poor grades and if this is the case, then it seems reasonable to expect that the assessment process could have identified the poor grades earlier in the process well before the interview stage.

It was a waste of time and effort for me. They should have told me that they would look at my grades, that academic performance

mattered more than socio-economic status. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

The TAP team clarifies that it:

...sent an official letter addressed to the Rector of selected higher education institutions with description of TAP, competition dates, criteria and requirements for participation. The letter also contained a request to provide a list of students who meet the criteria of the fourth TAP competition as well as their contact details but some Institutions didn't follow TAP requests, that's why some applicants got TAP applications even though they had mark C. (TAP team comments)

One or two applicants suggest that more recent strong grades are more indicative than poor grades at the beginning of their university course:

TAP's 'good academic performance criteria throughout the entire university course' is unfair to those who had good grades in most recent year, but not in the first years. Bad academic performance could be caused by difficult circumstances, e.g. having to work to support education. (Unsuccessful university applicant, Almaty)

One respondent feels that she has been discriminated against because she has one child and it appeared to her that the interviewers may have thought that she might have another baby and there was therefore a risk that she might not complete her college course. The same respondent felt that the income assessment did not permit a clear picture of her household's financial situation to come through. The TAP team clarifies that:

TAP sent official letters to each unsuccessful applicant with a clear reason of rejection to the postal addresses that were given by applicants in their application. During the outreach campaign some applicants changed their addresses and that's why they didn't get our letters with explanation of reasons.

In the TAP application we clearly wrote that university students should have very good academic performance and should have only A or B marks with no C and it was clearly written that TAP checks financial income of applicants.

TAP doesn't discriminate applicants if they have children. (TAP team comments)

The kinds of perceptions communicated by rejected respondents, whether accurate or not, are potentially damaging to the reputation of BOTA as a transparent organization.

2.3 Efficiency

This section refers to both the 2012 graduates and the 2012 applicants. The graduates have experienced the whole programme cycle whereas the 2012 applicants had not even received their first grant payments at the time of the interviews for this assessment.

2.3.1 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 although some indicated that they did not receive any reimbursement. In some cases, applicants mention that they incurred costs for getting health certificates or the documents they needed to prove the income of their household members. These costs were not reimbursed. The TAP only reimburses costs in person during the interview process when applicants can sign the necessary documents needed by the BOTA finance department. If documents are sent by the applicant by post and not given to a TAP staff member in person, the costs cannot be reimbursed. Overall, applicants to the 2012 round do not indicate cost of applying as a problem or a barrier to application.

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 although one graduate indicated that sometimes there were delays to the payments during the holidays. The TAP team clarifies that delays to payments can occur if the TAP student does not submit all the necessary documents on time. All 2012 successful applicants and all graduates indicate that the amount of the grant was adequate.

2.3.2 Payments

All graduates indicated that TAP grants payments nearly always came on time and any delays were addressed quickly following a short interaction with BOTA staff. Any delays to the payment of fees to the educational institutions are also resolved quickly although two of the 2012 applicants have experienced delays that they say are causing problems with their universities... *'the payment for studying has not yet come and the accounts department of our university is endlessly asking when the payment will be made'...* *'I was informed about involvement in TAP in September, when the students were already in the college. This delay caused problems. Also, there are delays in payment, not only to me, but to others as well...'* The TAP team clarifies:

TAP always pays tuition fees with no delay if we get correct invoices and agreements from colleges or universities. If the colleges or universities don't send invoices or agreement, TAP is not allowed to pay. So usually delays are caused by documentation problems from the side of the education facility. (TAP team comments)

2.3.5 Cost-efficiency of the TAP

The OPM report of February 2012 examining the cost-efficiency of the overall BOTA programme concluded that for the period between October 2008 to the end of June 2011, the TAP was carrying a 'non-grant' cost of \$173 for every \$100 received by grantees (O'Brien, 2012). The report highlights that in the case of the TAP, the 'non-grant' cost includes the high levels of support provided by TAP staff to applicants throughout the application process, the process of means-testing that helps to ensure that the TAP is targeted to the poorest students and ongoing high levels of support, training and regular contact provided by the TAP staff to grantees over the full period of their involvement in the programme. The report also notes that this cost per grantee would probably drop as more grantees joined the programme.

Given the high level of investment by the BOTA TAP in the application process and in supporting students after they have begun their studies, one way of assessing the cost-effectiveness of this investment in 'non-grant' costs is not only to monitor how successful it has been in targeting the programme to the poorest households, but also to monitor how the rate of grantees dropping-out

from their studies compares to other tuition assistance programmes. The 2011 qualitative report on the TAP noted that the TAP 'drop-out rate' at the time was running at around 10% while the national rate for students dropping out from higher education as a whole was around 16%. Latest data from the TAP team indicates that the TAP drop-out rate continues at around 10% and includes TAP recipients who drop out for a range of reasons, not only because of poor academic performance. Successful TAP recipients who get state educational grants also leave the TAP.

One key informant notes that:

BOTA invests a lot not only in the selection process but also in the follow up. They call them [the students], they visit. It carries a high cost and some people have said it is a very expensive programme, but others are saying that it has been worth it. [They] haven't done enough to share the good results with the government. I don't know what the government thinks. (Multilateral organisation, key informant interview)

Clearly, one of the ultimate measures of the cost effectiveness of the TAP (as opposed to cost-efficiency) will be the rate and/or quality of employment of its graduates compared to the investment made during the lifetime of the programme and compared to the rate/quality of employment in the wider population or, if data is available, the rate and quality of employment among young people from lower quintile households. It is too early to monitor this data, but preparations can be made in the remaining two years of the TAP to ensure that monitoring can continue beyond the lifetime of the programme after it ends in 2014.

2.4 Outcomes and impact

2.4.1 Outcomes for students and impact on their families

The 2012 applicants expressed a sense of relief that the awarding of a grant brings to the grantee and their family. Typical responses include:

It is now easier for my family. I am not a burden for them any longer. (Successful university applicant, Almatinskaya)

Without TAP, I would previously be psychologically not very relaxed, I feel relieved... It definitely affected my family's situation. I feel happy that I am not an impediment to my siblings' success. (Successful university applicant, Almaty)

I have only one parent (mother). She was worrying about how she'd afford my education. She was really struggling, but was extremely happy about my grant. (Successful college applicant, Almaty)

Receiving TAP was a relief financially for me, my dad, my grandma, my uncle. (Successful university applicant, Akmola)

My parents will not spend the family budget on my education, more benefit to my parents rather than myself (Successful university applicant, Akmola)

I feel proud that I helped my family in paying for my study (Successful university applicant, Aktyubinskaya)

Graduates similarly highlight the impact of the TAP on their families:

I was able to do research, participated in a scientific conference, won the first place there. My parents could now focus more on my siblings (University graduate 2012)

My parents spent less money on me and could focus more on my three little sisters. I always wanted to be independent, in all terms, including financially (College graduate 2012)

I was very happy to release my family from payment for my study (University graduate 2012)

Graduates also report considerable outcomes in terms of their personal and academic growth and development:

I was able to give up work and only concentrate on my studies. All I had to do is study, nothing else. I know no one among the TAP students who fooled around, they all study hard. ... It boosted my spirit that I was selected, it was flattering to be a BOTA grantee. (College graduate 2011)

TAP changed my world view that there is help out there for the most needy. (College graduate 2012)

...we become more confident and not depressed from financial difficulties...we gained interaction skills (University graduate 2012)

I became more clear about what I want to do with my life (College graduate 2012, West Kazakhstan)

I became more flexible, relaxed, confident, joyful. ... it changes the status, it gives confidence and a chance to get a great job. I gained all the skills necessary to get a good job. (University graduate 2012)

This impact on self-confidence, 'world view' and academic achievement was also noted by successful grantees and other key informants in the 2011 assessment.

2.4.2 Community service

While the information campaign appears to have been successful in communicating the new criteria for the TAP to the 2012 applicants and key informants as noted above, it seems to have been less successful in ensuring that the applicants and key informants are fully informed about all of the conditions relating to BOTA TAP grants. Many respondents reported not knowing about the community service element of the programme at all or having 'heard about it' but not knowing what it meant or how to go about it. It is understandable that little is known at such an early stage of the granting process, but the assessment team expected that successful grantees would at least have known that they are expected to undertake a certain number of hours of community service as a requirement of their grant.

All but one of the graduates interviewed confirmed that they had taken part in community service. Respondents mainly report that it was an important experience both for them personally as it changed their view of the world and '*those less fortunate than myself*' and gave them an understanding of the importance of this kind of voluntary work for society as a whole. One graduate has continued with voluntary work and a few others indicate that they would want to continue in the future with this kind of community contribution.

This experience improved me as a human being and gave me the possibility to understand that there are people who need help and attention. I continue to take part in public activities and soon am planning to go to the oncological center to visit children who have cancer. Maybe I can't help them materially, but I am ready to give them moral support and listen to them. In the future when I am self-sufficient I am ready to take part in charitable foundations and like BOTA to give a chance for a better life. (University graduate 2012)

Most respondents were happy with the community service component of the programme. One graduate from the 2010 intake had recommendations to offer on how to improve it:

When the TAP students were given options to choose from, most of the community service was offered in Almaty. I wish there were more options in other cities. During workshops, the organizations that were presenting themselves did not do so enthusiastically and did not provide contact information for follow-up. There should be a more developed and productive coordination between BOTA and other charity organizations and NGOs. (College graduate 2012)

2.4.3 TAP workshops for students

Graduates mainly confirmed the views of successful applicants from the 2011 assessment that the workshops are useful and fun. One graduate reported that she had never taken part in any workshops. Some respondents mention that the communication and inter-personal skills they gained from the workshops have been useful in their internships and employment. Others mention that the certificates awarded after each workshop are themselves valuable and useful as part of a job-seekers portfolio. Some of the 2012 graduates mention the careers advice offered in the final orientation workshop as having been useful and the TAP team confirms that a new three part training programme 'Preparing to Start Your Career' was created and organized in 2012 spring and *'during that training students were provided with List of HR companies, recruiting agencies, and on-line sources. A new training on entrepreneurship for 2013 Spring and Autumn is planned.'*

The main suggestions for improving the workshops relate to supporting students into internships and employment:

The speech and professional skills learned during workshops help in life and work. Those skills have partially prepared me for a professional life. BOTA could help its graduates with job options. (College graduate 2012)

2.4.4 Impact on employment prospects for graduates

As mentioned higher up in this report, graduates from 2011 and 2012 have now gained some experience of entering employment and this assessment has been able to gather feedback from about half of the graduates on their experiences.

Graduates who have entered employment or further education

Several graduates have entered employment or internships that are commensurate with their education and attribute this outcome directly to the benefits of their educational qualifications and their participation in the TAP. The types of employment that graduates have entered include: *'internship with the tax department of Almaty', 'going through a one month probation period as a food technologist (working as a cook) prior to full employment', 'playing professional football, I would never have studied without TAP support', 'after graduation, I've been working in an*

insurance company for the last three months', 'part-time internship as an accountant at a small firm'.

One college graduate who graduated in IT has gone back to working in the electrics department of a big department store where he had worked prior to getting his TAP grant. He has been frustrated by the quality of his college course which did not provide him with enough practical experience to be able to get a job in IT.

Two other college graduates are pursuing university degrees having completed college courses with their TAP grants *'I am now a third year Economics student (2 years of college counted toward my university degree) and will graduate in 2015.'* *'Now I am working in casual employment and continue to study at the same university on a correspondence course'.*

Nearly all of these graduates feel that their expectations of employment after higher education have been fully or partially met:

I was sure that after my diploma I would get a good job. My expectations have been fully met and realized as I work in one of the leading insurance companies in Kazakhstan. (University graduate 2012)

I believed and still believe that after graduation of the university I'll find a job I want to have (College graduate 2012)

Expectations have not been met yet but I am confident I will get my desired job. (University graduate 2012)

My expectations were fully met. I was able to find a much better job. (University graduate 2012)

Graduates who have not yet entered employment

Three graduates have not yet entered employment. One is a housewife:

After graduation from university, the Academy where I was studying got me a work placement at a train station in Aktau. I refused as it is very far from my home town. After finishing university I got married and had a child, I didn't manage to work. I'm not working currently. My family had financial problems. I thought if I study in the University, I can help them. I thought I would get a job immediately after graduation. (University graduate 2012)

Two are unemployed, and of these one has disabilities and lives in a rural area, both of which factors could be affecting her ability to gain employment:

After graduation I worked as and where I could, but not in my IT specialism. I went to Russia for one month to look for work, but came back to Kazakhstan. I don't think I could have found work without a university diploma and I don't know if I could have got into college and got an education without financial support. I am currently unemployed as I am only looking for work in IT that is commensurate with my education. (College graduate 2012)

I made a decision not to continue with education. I sent my CVs to different employers. Unfortunately nobody invited me to work. I'm not working currently. (College graduate 2011, with disabilities)

The expectations of these graduates have largely not yet been met *'I thought it would be easy to find job after graduation'; 'I had a huge desire to study, and work, but it did not come out easily'; 'I thought it would increase the chance of getting a job, but I haven't actually got a job since graduation. In any case, it was very nice to study at the college'*.

2.4.5 How can BOTA further help graduates into employment?

Some of the graduates interviewed do not think that BOTA cannot do much more than it has already done: *'All the BOTA Foundation could do, they have accomplished. Now it's up to me how to grow professionally.'*

Several, however, suggest that BOTA could provide further support to graduates in finding employment. Suggestions focus mainly on BOTA playing a practical role in *'linking graduates to employers'; '...give contacts for those organizations who can accept graduates according to their profession/education'*:

Help students into employment either by helping them to find internships or work placements. Helping them to network with potential employers and build their contacts. BOTA could use its own contacts to support students into employment after university. (College graduate 2011)

In terms of employment, it would be great if BOTA opened a special program dealing with graduates' employment. (College graduate 2012)

I wish BOTA Foundation could help with job search and try to place graduates with some entry-level positions. I am ready to gain more practical experience as an intern. If I could secure internship at an organisation as an assistant to an IT specialist I could have a chance to get some experience. I can't get work without experience. (College graduate 2011)

These comments confirm that the 'soft' employment skills such as presentation and interview skills provided through the workshops are useful up to a point. It will be important to engage employers at an early stage to make clear which skills they want and how they should be taught on an evolving basis and agree systems of on the job training. The BOTA TAP team has begun to work on developing further links with employers:

- A meeting was held in September with the American Chamber of Commerce to discuss possible internship places for TAP students. It published announcements for its members in an e-newsletter. Similar meetings with the "Atameken" National chamber of commerce and its regional branches are being planned.
- All TAP senior students are informed about the "Employment-2020" State program which includes the possibility of paid internships for graduates.
- In autumn 2011 BOTA sent letters to a large number of regional employment centres with a request to include the TAP graduates into the list of those eligible for paid internships and to inform them about vacancies.
- TAP help to ensure that TAP grantees are fully informed about government initiatives to help young people into employment.

2.5 Sustainability

Sustained outcomes for TAP grantees

Given that the first cohort has only graduated recently it is too early to examine any longer term employment outcomes from their participation in TAP. It is possible, however, to offer a view that the skills, life outlook and personal qualities nurtured by the TAP have been sustained in many cases through to employment. Graduates largely have a positive outlook and reflect many of the values that the TAP has tried to develop. The support offered by the TAP staff to their students has clearly been of great importance to some graduates:

I would like to express my gratitude to [my supervisor from TAP], I continue to be touch with her and she supports me morally and helps me to look for work in my specialism. (College graduate 2012)

Others have had the path their life was taking completely transformed:

If it had not been for the TAP grant, I probably wouldn't have been able to study [at the faculty of culture and sport of a pedagogical college] and if I'm honest, I don't know what I would have been doing now. (College graduate 2012, orphan, now a professional footballer)

Graduates referred above to their positive attitude to the BOTA TAP workshops and to the transformative feeling of pride, self-confidence and relief from financial worries that the TAP has given them. They don't mention explicitly their links to other TAP students, but this could partly be because they are a relatively small cohort that is quite geographically dispersed. It seems likely that the social capital that they have taken away from the TAP in the form of communication and inter-personal skills, self-confidence and improved life outlook or 'world view' can be further enhanced by involvement in an alumni group which will give them a sense of ongoing 'belonging' to the TAP community. The TAP team reports that they have begun to support some of their more active students to create an alumni group and to formalize it by registering as an association of graduates.

Another aspect of sustainability is that of the TAP programme itself and this is explored in the conclusions section below.

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 TAP going forward.

3.1 Summary conclusions

3.1.1 Relevance

Respondents confirm, on the whole, that the TAP continues to target students from low income households for support. The high level of relevance of the TAP that was found in the November 2011 assessment has been slightly compromised by the new focus on two year college courses for 11th grade school leavers and on 3rd or 4th year university students. Questions have emerged about whether the TAP is pushing students to take college courses that they otherwise would not choose, has forced students to choose two year courses where three or four year courses are more typical and appropriate and about whether the list of colleges that BOTA preferred applicants to apply to was actually as thoroughly researched as possible.

With regard to university students, the assessment raises questions about whether these students would have completed their studies without BOTA funding anyway, as they are so highly motivated and so close to completing, and therefore the TAP grant is a nice bonus, but not fulfilling the essential role it appeared to be fulfilling in previous rounds for 11th grade students wanting to enter university, but otherwise very unlikely to be able to. The unambiguous transformational experience reported by the interviewees in the first assessment round is tempered also in the interviews for this round by feelings of unfairness that they didn't know about, or have access to, this opportunity earlier in their academic careers.

The relevance of the TAP grant to graduates has been confirmed with a majority of those interviewed (eight out of 11 respondents), albeit from an extremely non-representative sample, having gone on to employment or further higher education study.

3.1.2 Effectiveness

The application and selection process has again shown itself to be largely fit for purpose, but with some issues being raised about the effectiveness and depth of the interview stage and some challenges to be overcome in the process of feeding back on results of their applications to candidates. A simple expedient of requesting a full transcript of grades at the point of submitting application forms could ensure that applicants are not arriving at interview in order to inform the panel for the first time about their grade history. This would save both the candidates and the interview panel from wasting time and resources. The making of conditional offers to applicants who have essentially passed all of the BOTA requirements including the interview and home check, but whose offer of a grant is dependent on reaching a certain level of achievement in the government standardized exams in 11th grade, could help to mitigate the disappointment of unsuccessful applicants and ensure that BOTA can make its offers ahead of the announcements of the exam results in August each year. Of course, BOTA is not planning any further rounds of the TAP, but if it should be proposing the TAP to the Government or other grant-givers as a model for introducing some element of means-testing and targeting of poorer students, then tweaking the applications process to reduce disappointment and perceptions of unfairness and subjectivity can only strengthen the model.

The question of ensuring that unsuccessful applicants receive at least some formal explanation for their rejection remains an issue among respondents. Perceptions of discrimination and lack of transparency are potentially damaging to BOTA and the recommendation from the first-round assessment of finding a cost-effective way of providing formal written reasons for rejection and

administering a questionnaire to applicants remains relevant. The perceptions of unsuccessful candidates may not reflect the reality of how the BOTA TAP carried out an activity or intended an activity to be carried out, but they can inform the way in which the programme and therefore the organization managing it is widely perceived.

Overall it is clear that the TAP has responded to some of the concerns about equity of access to the programme identified in 2011, but there remain one or two areas where the programme could be more effective.

3.1.3 Efficiency

The interviews conducted for this assessment confirm that overall the cost to the student of applying for TAP is low and most costs incurred, such as attending interviews, are reimbursed by BOTA. Some applicants report that their expenses were not reimbursed. The cost to BOTA per student of both the application process and the subsequent support to the grantees was high over the period of October 2008 to June 2011 as reported in the OPM costing study of February 2012. It is recognised, however, that the non-grant costs incurred by the BOTA TAP actually represent to a significant degree an investment in a drop-out rate that is lower than that of other higher education programmes and in ensuring that the programme is targeted to the poorest students. The non-grant costs will also fall substantially as a proportion of overall programme costs, as successful candidates continue to receive grants each year with minimal additional administrative costs on the part of BOTA.

3.1.4 Sustainability

The sustainability of the TAP outcomes for students can be seen in both their own personal, academic and professional growth as reported by graduates interviewed for this assessment, and in their achievements in higher education and employment. They carry forward a certain amount of social capital from their participation in the TAP that can be consolidated and strengthened through the alumni programme that is beginning to emerge with support from the TAP team.

This social asset, however, can be jeopardized by any compromise of the BOTA reputation as an organization with the highest standards and most transparent and objective processes and systems of targeting and selection. Managing the negative experience of unsuccessful applicants is important to ensuring that the investment made in successful applicants by the TAP is not reduced either in their further encounters with employers or post-graduate education. It has taken the BOTA TAP several years to reach a position where students have no doubts about applying to the TAP and have *'no doubts about the TAP grant, I trusted them that they would look into all the papers we submitted.'* Compared to applicants to the 2009, 2010 and even 2011 rounds, the applicants to this round were more full of trust than before and *'didn't doubt the legitimacy of TAP'*. This belief and the knowledge of the TAP that exists among the academic community and the education sector in the regions represents a clear outcome from the investment in outreach and in the programme as a whole since the beginning in October 2008. Given that the TAP seems to be offering a unique opportunity to motivated students from low income households that they cannot get through the government programme or anywhere else, it appears to be worth considering how best to capitalize on this investment in the final two years of the TAP. As one key informant from a multilateral organization put it ... *'[the TAP] offers a good model for the government to think about adjusting the equity within its current programmes, maybe spend some of the money it has in a different way.'*

Given that the TAP is unlikely to be able to continue to award hundreds or even several dozen grants each year after 2014, it seems likely that if it is to continue at all it will have to narrow its focus to specific, relevant target groups. It could be that it continues with the target groups that were identified for the 2012 round, but given the slightly ambivalent response to the round described in this report, it may be that the TAP would need to identify a specific, limited number of

grants and focus on narrow target groups that have clear and incontrovertible need. Key areas highlighted by respondents in the November 2011 and this assessment which could point the way to possible future roles for the TAP are suggested in the recommendations section below.

3.1.5 Outcomes

This assessment has been able to document in a small way the outcomes for about half of the first cohort of TAP grantees that have graduated in 2011 and 2012 and they can be summarised as follows:

- The tendency among the small sample interviewed tends to support the theory of change underlying the TAP that higher education qualifications from college or university can help graduates into employment and that the higher the qualification the better the employment is likely to be. There are exceptions, but on the whole the theory of change holds so far.
- A number of graduates, while having found employment themselves, offer suggestions that BOTA can play a more practical role in supporting its TAP grantees into employment. It could be that this is a role for the emergent alumni association.
- Graduates are carrying a certain amount of positive social capital away from their engagement with the BOTA TAP that goes beyond their educational qualifications. Some graduates describe this as *'the certificates from the workshops which are valuable when seeking employment'* others clearly describe the personal, academic and professional development they have experienced. For others it is the community service component that has helped to create a transformational experience and for yet others it is the pastoral support of the TAP staff. This outcome is hard to quantify, but as the numbers of graduates increases it will be possible to characterise it more and more clearly so that the results from the programme can be documented and shared.
- The quality of education provided to the TAP grantee is important for ensuring their subsequent employability. Graduates from some college courses report that they were not equipped with a practical education that enables them to get internships or employment in, for example, the IT sector. The impulse in the 2012 TAP round to identify high quality courses and education establishments, in order to ensure that the TAP investment achieves as far as possible the result of an employable graduate, appears therefore to be a correct initiative. The problem appears to be in the parameters that are used by the Ministry of Education in order to assess and accredit high quality education, particularly in colleges.

Overall the tendency to date shows largely positive outcomes for TAP graduates and the programme team has an opportunity to identify the best ways of increasing and then monitoring these positive outcomes in order to then continue with grants that support them, or to describe a model that can be used by others.

3.2 Recommendations for the TAP

Recommendations provided below focus on relevance, outcomes and sustainability. Specifically, recommendations are offered on helping to define the TAP in the coming two years and possibly beyond.

3.2.1 Improving the TAP effectiveness and strengthening outcomes up to 2014

Key areas to consider strengthening TAP effectiveness in the coming two years include:

- Continue to expand ways of supporting graduates into employment. The TAP team has already begun this process with a number of initiatives over the last year and this could be expanded to include a more 'hands-on' role of working with targeted potential employers to

create TAP internships in key cities where there are a high concentration of TAP grantees. Internships could begin while grantees are still students. This might be particularly appropriate for TAP college grantees, but could be equally relevant to some university grantees, depending on their specialisms. As an absolute minimum, the TAP can help to ensure that TAP grantees are fully informed about government initiatives to help young people into employment.

- Exploring ways of providing additional, practical support to TAP graduates with disabilities, or other special needs, who may experience discrimination or additional difficulties in seeking employment. This may mean linking with disability NGOs or campaigning groups and contacting employers in areas where there are several TAP graduates with disabilities and seeking opportunities for promoting inclusive employment policies.
- Identify TAP students who are enrolled in college or university courses that may be of lower quality and where there is a possibility that they may graduate with lower opportunities for achieving employment commensurate with their educational qualifications. Prioritise these students for support into employment.

3.2.2 Future possible roles for the TAP

As a minimum, the TAP can focus in the coming two years on ensuring at least some elements of sustainability beyond 2014:

- Document a more equitable means-tested and merit-based tuition assistance programme model – apart from describing the TAP processes and procedures, the next two years offers an opportunity for gathering data on the short to medium term outcomes for TAP graduates and their families. If the TAP can answer questions by 2014 about what the model can achieve for low income students in terms of employment, household income and other less tangible assets such as social awareness, self-confidence, positive life outlook, then it can go some way to ensuring that other donors and/or the government can benefit from the TAP lessons learned. Documentation can be done gradually over two years through questionnaires to grantees and graduates at regular intervals. If there is any way to administer questionnaires to rejected applicants and compare their progress with TAP grantees, this may also be able to help strengthen the evidence for a more equitable means-tested and merit-based tuition assistance programme approach by the government and other donors
- Continue to build an alumni group – the alumni group can fulfill several functions beyond the lifetime of the TAP including: supporting graduates into employment by helping them to network with employers; supporting graduates with disabilities or those who are disadvantaged by not having parents or family to help and support them after graduation as they are seeking employment; building a TAP network that can help graduates to make the most of the social capital they have gained from their participation in TAP and to promote TAP graduates to potential employers. The alumni group can continue the focus on community service that can eventually continue as the main activity once all graduates have entered employment and established their professional careers.
- Share the programme results with the Ministry of Education and other tuition assistance programmes such as those run by the Tatishev Foundation.

If the BOTA Foundation Board decides that the TAP should continue beyond the 2014 closure of the foundation in its current form, then this will require the creation either of an endowment for the TAP or of a fundraising strategy that can support the ongoing provision of TAP grants into the future. Either way, it is unlikely that the TAP can continue to provide high numbers of grants at the levels that it has been able to in the 2009-2012 rounds. Given this constraint, and if the decision to continue the TAP is taken, then the two rounds of the TAP assessment indicate a number of issues that would need to be taken into consideration in a smaller, less wealthy TAP. A number of criteria could help to narrow the field to ensure a smaller and more focused group of applicants for each round and therefore a higher proportion of successful applicants:

- The importance of the TAP to families with five or more children has been underlined repeatedly in the interviews undertaken for these OPM assessments. BOTA could consider a future role offering a limited number of means-tested and merit-based grants to the second, third, fourth and fifth or more children of low income families whether they are in the 11th grade and ready to apply to university or are already in the higher education system and need support to complete.
- The huge benefits of supporting young people with disabilities into higher education have been emphasized by respondents to these assessments even though the samples of these students have been small. BOTA could undertake to document the experience of TAP students with disabilities in higher education and identify strategies for not only helping them into education, but also into employment.
- Retain the important element of choice that the first three rounds of TAP offered to young people from low income households. Students had the opportunity to choose the university and course of their choice and this helped to define the truly transformational experience of the 2009-2011 intake as distinct from the more nuanced experience of the 2012 TAP intake.

References

- O'Brien, C. (2012), 'Analysis of BOTA programme costs, Oct 2008–Jun 2011, Final version', Oxford Policy Management.
- Rogers, J., Chanturidze, T. and MacAuslan, I. (2011), 'Qualitative assessment of the Tuition Assistance Programme. Report from the first round of the evaluation', Oxford Policy Management.
- World Bank (2012), 'World Development Indicators 2012'.

Annex A Question matrix

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

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

Annex B Fieldwork conducted

Table B.1 List of interviews 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		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Students, Selected,		Shymkent	Urban	Shymkent		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
3	Students, Selected,		Almaty Oblast	Rural	Almaty		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Akmola Oblast	Urban	Akmola		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
3	Student, selected		Akmola oblast	Rural	Akmola		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
4	Student, selected		Aktubunskaya	Rural	Aktiubinsk		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Zhambilskaia	Rural	Tarazsk		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		WKO	Rural	Uralsk		2011	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		SKO	Rural	Almaty		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Almaty Oblast	Rural	Almaty		2011	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Student, selected		Zhambylskaya	Urban	Almaty		2012	Still enrolled, receiving
1	Non-successful applicant		Aktubinskaia	Rural	Aktiubinsk		2011	Still enrolled received
1	Non-successful applicant		Almaty	Urban	Almaty		2010	Studying
1	Non-successful applicants		Almaty Oblast	Rural	Almaty		2011	Studying
1	Non-successful applicant		Astana	Urban	Astana		2012	No further education
1	Non-successful applicant		Astana	Urban	Astana		2012	Studying
1	Non-Successful applicant		Almaty Oblast	Rural	Almaty		2012	Studying
1	Graduate		WKO	Rural	Uralsk		2009	Working
2	Graduate		Kizilorda	Rural	Almaty		2009	1 Working/1 unemployed
1	Graduate		Zhambylskaia	Rural	Taraz		2009	Unemployed
1	Graduate		Karaganda	Urban	Karaganda		2012	Working
2	Graduate		Almaty	Urban	Almaty		2009	Working
1	Graduate		Mangistau	Rural	Almaty		2009	Working
2	Key Informant		Aktube	Urban	Aktube		2012	NGO representatives

1	Key Informant	EKO	Urban	Semey	2012	NGO representative
1	Key informant	Astana	Urban	Almaty	2012	Academic Institution
1	Key informant	Akmola	Urban	Almaty	2012	Academic Institution
1	Key informant	Almaty	Urban	Almaty	2012	Academic Institution