

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Brunel University London		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: The Urban Scholars Programme – a research-based educational intervention		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Valsa Koshy OBE	Former Urban Scholars Programme Director Emeritus Professor	01/1970 – 12/2016 04/2017 – present
Ms Carole Portman-Smith	Former Urban Scholars Programme Director	09/2006 – 10/2019
Ronald Casey	Researcher	09/1995 – 12/2016
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 to 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

In 2002, Brunel researchers launched the Urban Scholars Programme (USP), an educational intervention programme that tackles ‘wastage of talent’ among London pupils (aged 12 to 18) from low socio-economic backgrounds and supports schools with the implementation of the UK’s Widening Participation Policy. Since the previous assessment period, USP has continued to increase significantly the life chances of over 400 pupils from 30 schools and 9 local authorities in areas of high social deprivation in West and South London. The programme has fundamentally increased pupils’ scholarly attainment, lifted them up to Russell Group and Ivy League Universities (Cambridge, Columbia), amplified their orientation towards HE at GCSE-level through interventions in Maths and English, and directly contributed to boosting economic growth by facilitating greater social mobility.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The USP, set up in 2000, was conceived as a research-based intervention study to gain greater understanding of the complex structures that limit access and orientation of HE by youngsters from underrepresented groups. At Brunel University London, the research team included Professor Koshy, Ronald Casey and Carole Portman-Smith along with 2 research assistants and 2 University WP officers. Potential users – LA advisers and teachers – worked alongside the research team to design the intervention. The research took place in 2 4-year long cycles (between 2002 and 2010). Unlike typical short interventions to widen access, the USP featured sustained interventions delivered over time to learn lessons about the design and transportability. The longitudinal research deepened the researchers’ understanding of the malleability of structural forces that shape youngsters’ educational orientations, not understood at that time.

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An innovative Design Experiment (DE) methodology to take account of emerging data and reflect on the findings from the first cycles of the programme used a control group and continually monitored the effectiveness of different components of the intervention through immediate feedback from all the research participants – students, their parents, and teachers. To refine programme components and generate new hypotheses and practices, which could be used in other similar settings, researchers used analysed quantitative and qualitative data. These derived from questionnaires and interviews with students and their parents, focal group discussions with students providing immediate feedback, pupil trajectories, exam test results and interviews with a sample of users (LA co-ordinators and head teachers). The DE methodology enabled the research team to test theories in the context of practice and to work collegially with practitioners to construct practical knowledge relevant to a range of practitioners.

From this research, a multi-faceted sustained intervention model formed with subject-specific sessions in 3 core curriculum areas (English, Maths, Science), along with critical thinking, parental support, guest speakers and working with undergraduate mentors. With broad guidelines supplied by the USP team, and with the primary qualification being entitlement to free school meals, schools selected pupils with a potential for high achievement. The pupils were assessed through a series of tasks that involved problem-solving and analytical skills and using qualitative information rather than single dimensional test results. This model continued to be applied in the subsequent cycles of the programme for the REF cycle 2014 to 2020, subject to ongoing review and reflective evaluation.

The model identifies the relationships between programme outcomes and programme aims that include increased: higher education (HE) orientation; academic achievement; engagement with learning; understanding of self (critical thinking). Change is understood by examining the interaction between interventions designed to meet programme aims and an individual's response to interventions, which may be to: try harder, make more effort, increase focus, and show resilience. The strength of the interaction leads to change including raised educational attainment, enhanced decision making and personal action resulting in access to a wider range of education and career opportunities and improved life chances. The USP also provided clear information about educational/post- school pathways of interest and dynamic activities to develop the appropriate skills to enable them to pursuit that path; and a focus on the identification of aspirations and link these to clear expectations that enable specific goal setting.

To continue this activity post-REF 2014, further development grants were obtained since 2013, including annual funding from Moody's Foundation (USD292,000), Brunel University (GBP170,000) and Niftylift (GBP13,500).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Koshy, V; Brown, J; Jones, D. & Portman Smith, C. (2013) 'Exploring views of parents of high ability children living in relative poverty.' *Educational Research*. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2013.825167>
2. Koshy, V. & Pinheiro -Torres, C. (2012) 'Are we being de-gifted Miss?' Primary School Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators' responses to the Gifted and Talented Education Policy in England.' *British Educational Research Journal*. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3021>
3. Casey, R; Portman Smith, C. & Koshy, V. (2011) 'Opportunities and Challenges of Working with Gifted and Talented Students in an Urban Context: A University-Based Intervention Program.' *The Gifted Child Today*, 34(1), 35-43. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/107621751103400111>

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4. Koshy, V; Casey, R; Pinheiro - Torres, C. and Portman Smith, C. (2008) 'Surfacing Bubbles of Submerged Talent: Features of an Urban Scholars programme and Case studies of 20 Gifted and Talented Teenagers.' Report of a study commissioned by London Challenge, Department for Children, Schools and Families. [Report available on request from Brunel]
5. Koshy, V; Casey, R, and Taylor, A. (2008) 'The Urban Gifted student and Higher Education in the UK.' *Gifted Education International*, 24 (1), 5-19. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/026142940802400103>
6. Casey, R, & Koshy, V. (2001) 'Submerged Talent and World Class Recognition' in Richardson, C. (ed.) *Assessing Gifted and Talented Children: Papers Presented at an International Seminar, London, February 2001*, pp. 105-116. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (This book was an outcome of presentations by researchers from 7 countries at the QCA international seminar). [Book available on request from Brunel] ISBN-10: 1858384907

Research and Development grants (Total = GBP1, 491,000) have been obtained in the period 2000–2012. Competitive research bids included funds from the DfES (GBP360,000) and the Moody's Foundation in New York and London (GBP570,000); the remainder were awarded by charities.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research presented in the REF2014 case study had developed a number of strands that positively affected the aspirations and educational attainments of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. At the time, teachers felt uncomfortable about following a government policy requirement of picking 5 to 10% of the brightest children in their school as globally 'gifted and talented.' It was those children who, in most cases, made up the educational intervention groups at university programmes, however the concept was flawed and unworkable, particularly in schools where levels of achievement were low. Subsequently, Brunel research (Koshy & Pinheiro-Torres, 2012) raised the need for new assessment guidance to identify 'submerged talent.' This resulted in designing tools for a non-traditional, and more effective, assessment of potential ability and providing improved selection criteria to over 150 schools.

7 years later, the need for an educational intervention programme like the USP is still prevalent. At the April 2020 Mayor's Fund for London, 'One City, Two Worlds,' an Urban Scholar Alumnus reinforced the fact that the USP is still much needed because, "only 17% of London's professional jobs are occupied by people from lower income backgrounds compared to 30% nationally." Additionally, "the average person living in London is much less likely to have experienced upward mobility than someone situated elsewhere in the country" (E1).

Following funding streams from Brunel University Access Office, Moody's Foundation in New York and Niftylift in Milton Keynes, the USP has continued to influence students' attainment in the current assessment period. Between 2015 and now, 4 cohorts of students have participated in the 3-year long programme, with the current cycle still on-going:

- 2 Moody's Cohorts (January 2015 to January 2018; January 2018 to January 2021)
- 2 Access Cohorts (January 2017 to January 2020; September 2017 to September 2020)

Moody Cohorts

- Each Moody cohort is made up of 100 students, aged 15 to 16. The first cycle (between 2015 and 2018) entered the programme with 54% intending to go to University. At the end of the programme, that number had risen to 91% before rising even further when

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97% of the students ended up attending University. 65% of those progressed into 'High Tariff' Universities (Russell Group) and 83% chose to study STEM, Finance or Economics. 2 scholars from this cycle have won Fulbright / Sutton Trust scholarships and moved to the U.S. (E2; E3). 1 scholar received a place at an Ivy League University (Columbia University, New York). Other individual scholars' achievements include a nomination for the Royal Society of Arts and being made captain of St. John's College, Cambridge (winners of 2018 University Challenge) (E4).

- Students reported a higher level of confidence (57%), determination (80%), greater awareness of the benefits of studying now (84) and improved social skills (53%). Students' confidence is a critical factor for academic achievement. 100% of parents reported that the USP had raised their child's confidence, which is testament to the programme's success in increasing students' confidence (E3).
- The second cycle (between 2018 and 2021) also shows that students' attendance at the USP has direct impact in terms of improving their progression towards University. At the beginning of the programme, 66% intended to pursue Higher Education. At the end of the second year (2020), that number stands at 80% (E2).
- COVID-19 unfolded during the second cycle and with it came concerns that the pandemic would lead the nation into a time of declining social mobility and educational inequalities. This led the USP team to act quickly and switch to an online method of programme delivery, enabling students to stay motivated and connected. 95% of current scholars aim to apply for University entry in 2021 (E5).

Access Cohorts

- The USP have set attainment targets for the percentages of students who meet their school-predicted GCSE marks in English and Maths, given that those are 'passport' subjects to destination options.
- Between 2016 (Year 9 pre-entry) and 2018 (Year 11), 100 students from 6 schools, funded by Access Agreement, participated in the programme. 66% met or exceeded their target marks in English and Maths post-programme, a 44% increase from prior to the programme (E6; E7).
- Students reported a higher level of confidence (72%), increased future planning (79%), setting long-term goals (77%), and greater orientation towards Higher Education (87%) as a result of their participation in the programme (E7).
- Access also funded a Year 10 cohort of 48 students from 9 schools between 2013 and 2014, and a Year 11 cohort of 55 students from 10 schools between 2014 and 2015. 60% of the Year 10 cohort increased their knowledge of the steps they need to take to achieve their goals, compared to 38% pre-programme. 83% considered University as a possible future goal after attending the USP (E8). 80% of the Year 11 cohort reported the programme has enabled them to think about their future with 72% setting themselves goals to gain entry to University (E9).

As well as raising the aspirations and attainment of the students who attended the programme, there is evidence of impact of the research on:

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- Teachers from participating schools have benefited from the USP through professional development. The programme has supported teachers regarding the help they can provide to parents of the Urban Scholars in the navigation of the system that will enable their children progress into Higher Education and subsequently employment (E10; E11).
- In 2019, the Moody's Foundation issued an Impact Genome Scorecard, a tool used in the U.S. to measure the efficiency of social programmes. The USP received an 89% efficacy rate, 16% above the benchmark of 73%. This means that 89% of beneficiaries have "developed marketable job skills; attained the soft skills and knowledge necessary to search for employment; attained certifications and education in areas related to high demand careers, and removed significant barriers to employment" (E12).

7 years later, the USP is still a leading example of how educational intervention led by excellent research can lift students up, reduce the attainment gap, and contribute to greater social mobility which could boost global growth by almost 5% in the next 10 years (E13).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

E1: One City, Two Worlds: London's Social Mobility Puzzle, Mayor's Fund for London, February 2020

E2: Destination Data Gathered for Moody's Urban Scholars Cohorts 2006 – 2020

E3: Moody's Urban Scholars Programme, End of Year Report, October 2018

E4: Moody's Urban Scholars Programme, Mid-Year 2 Report 2019

E5: Moody's Urban Scholars, End of Programme Report, August 2020

E6: End of School Year, Summer Term Examination Data Analysis, Access Group 2016-2018

E7: Brunel Inclusion Access and Student Success Committee, End of Year Evaluation Form, 2017-18

E8: Brunel Urban Scholars 2013-2014, Year 10 'Access Group' Report

E9: Brunel Urban Scholars 2014-2015, Year 11 'Access Group' Report

E10: Interview, St. Thomas More School, August 2016

E11: Interview, Uxbridge High School, August 2016

E12: Impact Genome Scorecard, 2019

E13: The Guardian, 19 January 2020,

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jan/19/greater-social-mobility-will-help-narrow-gap-between-rich-and-poor-says-wef>