



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

Impact in international higher education

M Satish Kumar



Dr M Satish Kumar is a specialist in Indian and South Asian development studies and is currently Director of the Queen's Academy in India and Senior Lecturer at the School of Geography, Archaeology and Paleocology at Queen's University Belfast (QUB). He was awarded a Commonwealth Academic Fellowship in 1997 and spent one year at Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge. Satish has worked in the higher education sector for 26 years and has dedicated the last 14 years of his career to the development of QUB's internationalisation agenda, with a particular emphasis on developing research links with universities in India. Additionally, he is engaged in UK-wide initiatives to develop collaborative partnerships between the two countries.

Academic Fellowship

Dr Satish Kumar gained his PhD in Social Sciences in the field of labour and development at Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi in 1991 and continued at his alma mater as Assistant Professor in Populations Studies and Manpower Planning. He had previously undertaken a pre-doctoral programme in 1987 at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex on a Ford Foundation scholarship and, after having worked in his role for eight years, was looking to return to the UK to further develop his academic knowledge and skills.

Satish submitted a proposal for the Academic Fellowship in 1997 and secured a Commonwealth award at Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge in the Department of Geography. His employer was very supportive of his decision to return to the UK and granted him a year of paid leave to pursue the Fellowship. Satish attributes their backing to the dedication that he had demonstrated over eight years of consistent work at the university, as well as the teaching and research skills that they anticipated he would be equipped with on his return.

Satish is very appreciative of the 'incredible exposure' that he gained from the time spent with academics at the University of Cambridge whilst on his Fellowship. In addition to conducting his research on historical urban development, Satish provided teaching support and assisted with tutorials and lectures. Satish's time on his award led to his election as Visiting Fellow of Fitzwilliam College, a prestigious award that allowed him to continue

his research activities at the University of Cambridge for an additional year. He was also appointed as an Affiliated Lecturer at the University's Department of Geography during this time.

'I still count my Cambridge years as one of the best periods of my academic career, particularly because I was exposed to a range of research opportunities, ideas, concepts... I had an absolutely brilliant, grounded, rounded experience'

Commenting on his two years in Cambridge, Satish described the freedom to focus completely on his research during his first year as a Commonwealth Fellow. This allowed him to travel within the UK to access research resources and network with academics in his field. In addition he had the time to focus on writing several papers which he presented at conferences. He described the Commonwealth Fellowship year as an important period in his career which allowed him to expand his outlook on higher education and provided him with the opportunity to reflect on, evaluate and construct the future of his academic career. He believes that this period was critical in his evolution as an academic as well as in his understanding of his role as a global citizen.

Employment following the Fellowship

After the completion of his Fitzwilliam Fellowship, Satish returned to Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi. The university recognised the added value that he brought back from his time in the UK by promoting him to the position of Associate Professor and he resumed his teaching and administrative duties, including the management of a postgraduate programme. He described that, compared to his teaching style pre-award, he had developed a greater awareness of the importance of creating the correct learning environment for his students. Having observed the benefits of individualised support on academic performance he initiated intensive tutorials for his students and introduced teaching methods that provided them with hands-on experience, encouraging taking ownership of their education and engaging them in active learning in the classroom. Additionally he varied his teaching techniques to include teaching in smaller groups and employing audio-visual presentations

Six months after returning from the UK, Satish was approached with an opportunity at Queen's University Belfast as Lecturer in the School of Geography, Archaeology and Paleocology. He acknowledges that in addition to his experience of teaching international development, an area which the university was keen to introduce into its curriculum, the knowledge and teaching skills that he brought from the University of Cambridge were also key factors in the recruiters' decision to appoint him to this role. He was particularly interested in the post as it was focussed on internationalisation of the curriculum and building partnerships with universities internationally. As an India and South Asia specialist, Satish was motivated to accept the position when he learnt that he would have the flexibility to mould the role to build partnerships with the Indian higher education sector.

Satish felt that an important contribution to his students at QUB would be to develop a curriculum drawing on global research and his teaching has focussed on the challenges of international development through the introduction of advanced modules, with a particular emphasis on sustainable development in the BRIC countries. From his time at the University of Cambridge, Satish developed an understanding of the need to provide students with the appropriate tools in order for them to excel and his development of a handbook for the dissertation module became an exemplar for future reference material provided to students. Satish's strong commitment to continuous improvement in his teaching and internationalisation of the curriculum was recently recognised as he was awarded the student nominated Queen's Teaching Award 2014.

In addition to his work in the higher education sector, Satish is also involved in building cultural links between the community in Northern Ireland and India. He is the Chairperson of ArtsEkta, a leading ethnic arts and cultural organisation which aims to strengthen relationships between diverse ethnic communities. Satish believes that the most important part of their work is raising awareness of the contribution that diverse groups in the community make to the local economy and society, thereby tackling the challenges of racism.

Development impact

The scope to build international higher education links with India was an important factor in Satish's decision to join Queen's University Belfast. Since 2005 he has led the university's engagement with Indian universities and identified areas of partnership in interdisciplinary research activity. As part of this work he has led QUB's initiative to identify Indian higher education institutions that produce high value research and have strong teaching programmes in the arts and sciences and has facilitated the development of research links with the University of Hyderabad, Bengal Engineering and Sciences University in Calcutta and, his own alma mater, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi.

One key example of the partnerships that Satish has facilitated is in cancer research. In 2006 he was nominated to participate in a Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland mission to India lead by former Republic of Ireland Prime Minister Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. As a result of this mission and a follow up trip to India with former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Rt. Hon. Peter Hain MP, Satish facilitated the development of a project between researchers at Queen's University Belfast and the National Institute of Immunology (NII) in New Delhi, funded jointly by the Ministry of Biotechnology in India and the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. This resulted in the first satellite symposium on cancer research between the research groups based in the two countries and led to two additional international symposiums on cancer biology over two funding rounds.

'We need to engage in higher education partnerships in India with a fresh approach to consider how we can provide accredited courses that help in the skilling of people who are moving into the labour market'

More recently Satish has expanded his work in this area to develop a programme for building links between universities in the northeast of India, a largely underdeveloped region in the country, and universities in the UK. The project is designed to build capacities and capabilities at Indian institutions, with a particular emphasis on high quality teaching and research as well as accessibility, affordability and employability. The project aims to embed UK quality assurance principles and practices into the Indian higher education system and foster the development and expansion of national knowledge networks. An important element of the project is ensuring that research is translated into industrial enterprise. In addition, Satish is currently participating in a trade, investment and higher education mission to India lead by the UK Deputy Prime Minister Rt. Hon Nick Clegg.

As part of the QUB internationalisation agenda, Satish has also coordinated the Queen's India Lecture series, which showcased top academics from Indian universities and invited them to deliver lectures at QUB on a diverse range of disciplines. He also initiated and coordinated the Queen's Welcome India Programme, which selected high-calibre undergraduate students from India and sponsored them to visit laboratories at Queen's for a two-week period.

In 2003 Satish received the India-European Union Global Peace and Friendship award in recognition of his contribution to promoting international peace and understanding based on the values of peace, education and culture in communities in the UK and India. He was also awarded the Bhoovigyan (Earth Scientist) Leadership award in India in 2002.

Looking to the future Satish is keen to continue to expand his work in bilateral higher education partnerships and explained that Indian institutions are very keen to engage with their counterparts in the UK as they benefit from the expertise regarding quality assurance compliance and skills development of university staff and faculty in areas of research, teaching and administration.

Commonwealth award

For Satish, one of the most important outcomes from his time on the Fellowship was the deep sense of purpose he developed about his role in the higher education sector. He described that at the end of his two years at Cambridge he had the confidence to be able to make a contribution to his field and a strong desire to be in an environment that would allow him to make a difference to higher education and society.

‘The Commonwealth award is a great opportunity and Scholars should never lose track of the fact that they have an opportunity to contribute to global society’

More about Dr Kumar’s work

1. Featured in BBC2’s The Country House Revealed: Clondeboye Estate and its Imperial Collections, 7 June 2011: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_i9iUKtd7c
2. Public lecture in Chennai covered in *The Hindu*, 18 August 2010: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Chennai/article577240.ece>
3. LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=12119473>
4. Researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/M_Satish_Kumar

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