Research Fellowship 2018
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The PAL Network is pleased to announce the launch of a new Research Fellowship Program, providing the opportunity for up to four talented staff within the network to develop their research skills through an intensive four-month placement based at the network Secretariat office in Nairobi, Kenya.

Fellows will expand their familiarity and understanding of citizen-led assessment data (‘CLA’) by undertaking an independent research study to produce new insights from existing data.

Fellows will participate in a series of training workshops throughout the four-month placement, focusing on data analysis, methodology and academic writing. The workshops will be facilitated by a mixture of internal and external experts in citizen-led assessments. Applications for the program will open in July 2017 and PAL Network will welcome the inaugural cohort of Research Fellows in January 2018.

The Research Fellowship Program has five key objectives:

1. To strengthen familiarity and confidence in mining CLA data for new insights;
2. To promote research collaboration and peer-supported learning between fellows that will continue once the fellows return to their home institution;
3. To produce new insights from across the network through a Working Paper Series;
4. To enable visiting fellows to obtain insight into the functioning of the network through close collaboration with a cohort of research fellows from other network member countries;
5. To unite the efforts of citizen-led assessments for greater global influence.
Fellows will arrive in Nairobi in January, where they will be welcomed by the Secretariat team and settled into the place they will call home for the next four months. The fellows will participate in a one-week residential induction to the PAL Network, combined with a series of team-building activities to get to know each other, and the Secretariat team.

Following shortly after the week-long induction, fellows will participate in a week-long workshop on citizen-led assessment data, facilitated through the Data and Design Working Group. The workshop will provide the opportunity for fellows to work through their proposed research studies and further develop their research questions and proposed methodologies. The fellows will spend the next month further developing their research study and conducting preliminary analysis.

Towards the end of February, the fellows will join the Research Working Group for a seminar on academic writing, with the opportunity to present their emerging analysis to the group for comments and feedback.

In March, the fellows will be joined in Nairobi by two post-doctoral researchers and one faculty staff member from the University of Cambridge’s REAL (Research for Equitable Access and Learning) Centre. The REAL centre will design a bespoke two-week program of targeted support tailored to the progress and individual research projects of the fellows. This support may include workshops, seminars, or 1-on-1 sessions, covering methods training, data analysis, data visualization, making presentations, or reading and commenting on drafts, as requested.

In the final month of the fellowship program, fellows will develop a Working Paper, supported by their identified mentor(s) within the network. The post-doctoral researchers will also be on-hand remotely to read through final drafts of Working Papers to provide further comments and edits. Upon completion of their Working Paper in mid-May, fellows will return to their home institutions.

Fellows will be expected to design an independent research study that will produce new insights from existing data from across the PAL Network. Fellows will be expected to write up their research projects into a Working Paper of 6,000-9,000 words. Working Papers of a high standard may be designed and published internally. Working Papers of exceptionally high standards may be further developed into a peer-reviewed journal article after completion of the fellowship program.

After completion of the program, fellows will be invited to write a proposal to present their research at an education conference of their choice, within eighteen months of completing the fellowship program. If approved, the PAL Network shall meet the costs of the fellow presenting at the identified conference.
Research generated through the PAL Fellowship Program should reflect the needs and interests of the growing network of citizen-led assessment countries. Preference will be given to research studies with a comparative dimension, acknowledging the important distinctions between countries with different contexts, processes, tests and tools.

All proposed research studies must demonstrate a balance between depth and breadth of research. Depth may be achieved through the presentation of a case study that explores a particular issue or theme in one or more of the network countries. Breadth may be achieved through the addition of a comparative dimension – either by looking at multi-country data on the chosen research topic, or through exploring implications or recommendations for the network membership.

The final research project must contain some element of comparison across one or more network countries if the proposed research itself is not a comparative study.

The PAL Network does not impose a specific set of research questions or topics for the proposed study, and encourages the submission of original research proposals in an area of particular interest to the applicant.

Below we describe some research topics that are likely to be a good fit within the overall goals and objectives of the PAL Network. These topics are not meant to be prescriptive or exclusionary, but are intended to provide context and stimulate thinking. Applicants are encouraged to submit innovative proposals under any topic of particular interest.

### Access to Education

Primary School enrolment has increased in many low-income countries over the past 15 years. Despite the significant progress that has been made getting children into school, access and completion rates within and between PAL Network countries varies greatly. Reporting average gains has masked large and persistent inequalities in access and completion which are exacerbated by inequalities such as household wealth, location, gender and disability status. PAL Network is interested in mining existing data for new insights into inequality of access within and between PAL Network member countries.

### Inequality of Learning Outcomes

Despite significant progress made getting more children into school over the past 15 years, evidence from the PAL Network suggests that being in school does not necessarily equate to learning. In addition, learning inequalities start even before children start school, and widen throughout the primary school cycle. These inequalities are driven primarily by disparities in wealth, and are compounded when wealth disparities interact with other forms of disadvantage such as location, gender and disability status. PAL Network is interested in mining current data for new insights into inequality of learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged children across the PAL Network.
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its indicator framework requires careful measurement to monitor progress. The education goal (SDG 4) is made up of 10 targets aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all. Citizen-led assessments provide important data that make the invisible problem of poor foundational learning visible. PAL Network is interested in producing new insights from existing data that firstly anchor current PAL Network data to the SDG 4 Indicator Framework and secondly, produce new insights into the necessity of using citizen-generated data on learning to monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs for all children.

The PAL Network’s household-based, citizen-led assessments assess a child’s foundational reading skills and basic math ability. The content of the assessments is generally aligned to Grade 1, 2 and 3 of the national curricular expectations of that country in question. The tests are orally and individually administered. The PAL Network testing tools have several advantages: they are simple, quick, cost-effective, and easy to train citizen volunteers how to administer. All of these features allow the large scale administration of these assessments. Over time, several pertinent questions have been raised about how the results from citizen-led assessments compare with similar learning assessments at national, regional and international level.

The PAL Network is interested in studies that look at trends over time. Trends over time may look at the change in reading or mathematics levels over time (possibly accompanied by supplementary documents comparing sample description over time, as well as household characteristics, mothers and fathers schooling, class-wise composition of children in the sample and more); or enrolment trends over time (focusing on trends in the proportion of out of school children, primary school completion and proportion of children attending different types of school (govt, private, others) and more). PAL Network is also interested in the creation of artificial cohort studies or pseudo panel studies.
The application to be a PAL 2018 Research Fellow comprises the following three documents:

1. **Up-to-date CV / Resume**
   - Submitted CVs should be strictly no longer than 3 pages in length and must include any relevant skills and training related to the fellowship program.

2. **Summary of Proposed Research**
   - The summary should be strictly no longer than 3 pages in length (or 1,500 words). The summary should provide a succinct overview of the research proposal, clearly indicating why the proposed research is important, what the project aims to address and how the project will be undertaken.
   - The summary must include mention of your proposed methodology, the datasets you intend to use and your proposed data analysis software. In addition, the summary must include a section describing how the proposed study will demonstrate a balance between depth and breadth.
   - Lastly, the summary must identify at least one academic mentor who is willing to provide remote support to the research project. Identification of more than one academic mentor is allowed, and the mentor does not strictly have to be a member of network staff.

3. **Statement of Contribution**
   - The statement of contribution should be strictly no longer than 1 page in length (or 500 words). The statement should clearly articulate the anticipated contribution of the individual research study to the work of the PAL Network.
Fellows are expected to work full-time on their research project and require sign-off from the director of their home institution to confirm they have been released from their current role for the duration of the fellowship program. During the four-month placement, fellows will be expected to participate as full-time members of the network Secretariat. Fellows will work alongside Secretariat staff within regular office hours and will participate in weekly team meetings and team-building activities. During the four-month program it is expected that the fellows’ time will be roughly structured as follows:

- **Working on individual research projects (approximately 60%)**
- **Participating in a program of academic and research training (30%)**
- **Participating in the work of the Secretariat (approximately 10%)**

### Fellowship Award

Fellows will be awarded the following:

1. **Return flight from home country to Secretariat office in Nairobi**
2. **Fully furnished and functional shared accommodation for the program duration**
3. **Fully funded participation in organized training and workshops**
4. **Lunch in the office on official working days**
5. **Monthly tax-exempt stipend to cover living expenses (USD $1,000 per month)**
Fellows will participate in, and contribute to, a program of training and support encompassing the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training And Support</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intensive residential induction week</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellows will kick off their time in Nairobi with an intensive five-day residential induction to become familiarized with the work of the PAL Network, the expectations of the Fellowship Program, and get to know the Secretariat team</td>
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| **Training on using citizen-led assessment data** |
| Fellows will participate in a week-long training workshop that concentrates on how to use citizen-led assessment data, facilitated through the Data and Design Working Group |

| **Workshop on academic writing** |
| Fellows will join the Research Working Group for a seminar on academic writing, with the opportunity to present their emerging analysis to the group for comments and feedback. |

| **Intensive two-week support from University of Cambridge** |
| Fellows will be joined in Nairobi by two post-doctoral researchers and one faculty staff member from the University of Cambridge’s REAL Centre. The REAL centre will design a bespoke two-week program of targeted support tailored to the progress and individual research projects of the fellows. This support may include workshops, seminars, or 1-on-1 sessions, covering methods training, data analysis, data visualization, making presentations, or reading and commenting on drafts, as requested. |

| **Weekly learning sessions** |
| In partnership with other education programs in Nairobi, the PAL Network holds a one-hour learning session every Friday afternoon. Fellows are expected to contribute and learn from one another’s experience. |

| **Communicating research training** |
| Fellows will participate in a series of workshops on how to communicate research towards the end of their fellowship placement |
The fellowship is open to applicants currently working within one of the 14 member institutions of the PAL Network. In addition, the PAL Network is seeking applicants with the following skills and experience:

**Background and experience**

- Basic familiarity with citizen-led assessment datasets with strong skills and interest in research, data analysis and writing for publication;
- Ability to frame research questions and answer them using quantitative datasets;
- Demonstrable ability in research methods, quantitative data analysis or statistics;
- Working knowledge of English

**Essential skills and attributes**

- Strong familiarity with data analysis software
- (STATA, SPSS, R or other)
- Highly developed analytical capabilities
- Ability to communicate clearly and articulately in writing
- Ability to work collaboratively, as an effective team member and in a wider organizational structure, working with a range of junior and senior colleagues

**Desirable experience and skills**

- At least 2 years’ experience working on citizen-led assessments
- Demonstrable experience writing research papers, annual reports, summary reports, policy and information briefs and blogs
- Ability to work in a fast paced environment and to tight deadlines
- Familiarity with other international assessment data e.g TIMMS, PIRLS, PISA-D, SAQMEC/PASEC, etc
The summary of proposed research will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

**Rigour**
Presence of a clear, data-driven research question designed in such a manner that will provide useful information;

**Contribution to evidence-base**
Potential to address key knowledge gaps using data from citizen-led assessments;

**Relevance**
Clear articulation of the relevance of the proposed study to the overall aims and objectives of the PAL Network;

**Actionability**
Results can be used in the near-term to inform priorities and decisions;

**Feasibility**
The applicant has the necessary skills to carry out the proposed research within the program timeline

Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed over Skype by at least two members of the Selection Committee. Shortlisted candidates will also be expected to complete simple data analysis exercises using citizen-led assessment datasets. If necessary, a final round of Skype interviews will be conducted to determine the final selection.

**Peer Support**

Upon arrival in Nairobi, each fellow will be assigned one staff member at the PAL Network Secretariat as a ‘buddy’ for the duration of their stay. The ‘buddies’ will be responsible for ensuring that the Fellows settle into and navigate a new city seamlessly, as well as organizing team building activities to build stronger working relationships.

Each buddy will schedule an informal ‘check in’ meeting on a weekly basis to ensure that the Fellows feel well supported and are able to access everything they need for an enjoyable stay.

Another important component of peer support will be provided by the fellows themselves. The fellows will be seated together in the same office, undergo the same training support and will be provided shared accommodation within walking distance to the office to prevent fellows feeling isolated and encourage an exciting shared experience.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship website live in 3 languages</td>
<td>30th June</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Program in PDF and pre-departure handbook in PDF uploaded onto website</td>
<td>3rd July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellowship Communications Campaign to network members</td>
<td>3rd – 21st July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applications Open</td>
<td>24th July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application deadline</td>
<td>13th August (midnight East Africa time)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shortlisting (on a rolling basis)</td>
<td>24th July – 15th August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skype Interviews with Selection Committee and short data analysis exercise</td>
<td>14th – 25th August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Interviews and decisions</td>
<td>28th – 1st September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successful applicants notified</td>
<td>4th – 9th September</td>
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<td>Operations team begin arrangements for travel and arrival</td>
<td>12th September onwards</td>
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## Activity Dates

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fellows arrive in Nairobi</td>
<td>12th January</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAL residential induction week</td>
<td>15th - 19th January</td>
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<td>CLA data training</td>
<td>22nd – 26th January</td>
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<td>(Data Working Group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific writing workshop</td>
<td>26th – 28th February</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Research Working Group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-doctoral research training and support</td>
<td>18th – 30th March</td>
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<tr>
<td>(University of Cambridge)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating research workshop (TBD)</td>
<td>23rd – 25th April</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellows return to home institutions</td>
<td>19th May</td>
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