



## Annex A – Studentship Application Form

<p><b>Title of proposed research – Education pathway</b></p>
<p>Enhancing Inclusive Remote Learning in Remote areas of Low- and Middle-Income Countries</p>
<p><b>Your research proposal.</b></p> <p><b>IMPORTANT: There is a <u>strict</u> 1300-word limit, fully inclusive of everything except references. This includes all the written text, quotes, in-line citations, section headers, captions, the contents of tables and any foot-/endnotes. Each figure/graphic should be counted as equivalent to 200 words. Tables should be counted as the number of words they contain. Proposals that are found to be overlength will be rejected. Remember that if you are applying to one of our interdisciplinary programmes, a clearly articulated interdisciplinary approach should be evident.</b></p>
<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>This research addresses inclusive remote learning (IRL) for marginalised learners in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). A particular focus is placed on school-aged learners with disabilities living in remote areas. It is framed within the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and builds on my established research for UNESCO. For this multi-methods research project, I will collaborate closely with <a href="#">Inclusion International</a>, along with Ministry of Education staff in LMICs (contacts already established through my UNESCO research).</p> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>This research, which is both in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the ESRC’s ‘<i>new Covid-19 research</i>’, will contribute to knowledge in an emerging and highly-relevant field. It will have a number of valuable impacts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Governments and other stakeholders will benefit from research that focuses on inter-sectoral coordination and a systems approach to IRL when planning and delivering initiatives.</li> <li>2. Marginalised learners who are excluded from education due to factors including disability, poverty and geographical location will benefit from the findings of this research.</li> <li>3. It will build knowledge and provide evidence in an emerging area which will help to stimulate further research and investment into IRL.</li> </ol> <p><b>Rationale</b></p> <p>As the Covid-19 pandemic forced school closures world-wide, remote learning allowed education to continue for many. However, one third of the world’s children – the vast majority of whom live in LMICs - have been unable to access remote learning during the pandemic (UNICEF, 2020). It is the learners at the intersection of poverty, geographical remoteness and disability – those that have historically been most at risk of exclusion from education (Singal, 2011; Groce et al., 2011) - that have been disproportionately affected by school closures (Dube, 2020). These same learners are also the least likely to be able to access quality remote learning, further compounding their exclusion from education (UNESCO-IITE, 2020). Learners with disabilities living in remote areas of LMICs (R-LMICs) therefore, are the target group for this research.</p> <p>For remote learning to benefit all learners, it must be made both inclusive and accessible (Sangrà et al., 2012; World Bank, 2020). Designing remote learning on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one way to enhance inclusivity in terms of the educational content (Tobin, 2014; Frumos, 2020). UDL will provide an important framework for this research.</p> <p>The design, development, delivery and coordination of remote learning systems have a large bearing on their accessibility and their impact (Dube, 2020; Vishkaie, 2020). The use of education technology (EdTech) is particularly relevant to remote learning (Sparks, 2019; Tauson and Stannard, 2018). Further research, however, is needed to establish how it can be made accessible to the most marginalised learners (Trucano, 2013). Limiting factors such as unreliable electricity grids, lack of internet coverage or</p>



computer access can mean that many IRL initiatives used in high-income countries or urban areas are unusable in R-LMICs (Dube, 2020): an imbalance in resources that has the potential to drastically widen an already increasing educational gap (Vishkaie, 2020).

Governmental/stakeholder coordination is important in terms of how IRL is designed, and how and where it is used; Kranzberg’s (1986) laws of technology provide an interesting and valuable foundation in this respect. My research for UNESCO has pointed towards the need for not only more effective EdTech implementation for IRL, but also for a shared vision and a targeted, systems approach among all stakeholders regarding the implementation of inclusive education initiatives.

Against this background, a key question is: *how can remote learning be made inclusive of, and accessible to, learners with disabilities in R-LMICs?*

**Aims and Research Questions**

This research aims to:

1. Analyse the impact of Covid-19 on learners with disabilities in R-LMICs.
2. Analyse and develop good practice of delivering IRL, particularly in areas with poor electricity or internet connection.
3. Provide government Ministries and other stakeholders with recommendations that will enhance the development and implementation of IRL.
4. Contribute to UDL and associated concepts for IRL.

These will be addressed by five research questions (RQ):

1. How have learners with disabilities in R-LMICs been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. In what ways does remote learning (including IRL) take place in these areas?
3. What are the main technological, institutional and social barriers and enablers for IRL in these areas?
4. How can IRL best be delivered in poorly-connected remote areas?
5. How can coordination of best practise IRL between stakeholders be promoted and maintained?

**Methodology**

This table presents five methodology phases, along with a proposed timeline. Each phase is associated with, and aims to answer, specific RQs.

Phases	Focus and Method
1. Scoping study/literature review and stakeholder analysis	<b>RQ: 1, 2 &amp; 3</b> A scoping study (Arksey and O’Malley’s, 2005) to ‘map’ the relevant literature, the key concepts underpinning the IRL research area and the main sources and types of evidence available will be completed. This will include academic literature, international reports and policy documentation and will be used to both critically appraise theory, and develop an analytical framework for further phases. A stakeholder analysis (Reed et al., 2009) (carried out with <i>Inclusion International</i> ) will target interview participants for Phase 2.
2. In-depth, semi-structured interviews	<b>RQ: 3, 4 &amp; 5</b> Semi-structured interviews (20) (Winter, 2000; Bryman, 2016) with remote learning, inclusive education and EdTech experts, along with representatives from international organisations, will be facilitated by <i>Inclusion International</i> . These will aim to answer RQs 3, 4 and 5; the findings of which will feed into Phase 3. Interviews will be carried out remotely over Zoom or equivalent.
3. Comparative case study analysis in R-LMICs (field research)	<b>RQ: 3, 4 &amp; 5</b> Comparative case study analysis (Goodrick, 2014) in R-LMICs, facilitated through close collaboration with Ministry of Education staff in Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia and Zanzibar. This will allow in-depth analysis of good practice and comparison between different IRL



	initiatives within countries of a similar economic standing. The findings will lead to Phase 4.
4. Co-design workshops	<b>RQ: 4 &amp; 5</b> A series of online workshops (4-6) with selected stakeholders (15-20) (guided by <i>Inclusion International</i> ) to discuss case study findings and co-design/identify best practice for IRL coordination and implementation.
5. Synthesis of results and recommendations	Final analysis and synthesis of all results will advance theoretical development of UDL. Recommendations prepared for Ministries and stakeholders.

### Challenges and Solutions

Potential challenge	Proposed solutions
Accessing international organisations and key individuals	<i>Inclusion International</i> will provide access to key individuals in their partner organisations (e.g., UN agencies; the World Bank; international NGOs). UNESCO will link me with further IRL actors.
Irregular or un-structured communication and collaboration with <i>Inclusion International</i>	Monthly virtual meetings with <i>Inclusion International</i> , with a mutually-agreed agenda, as has proved useful with UNESCO and their partners.
Issues with field research; e.g., visa complications or restricted access to individuals or data	Building on established relations with Ministries will help to mitigate field research issues. I have already received official governmental support to conduct research in Namibia and I am expecting similar letters from Eswatini, Kenya and Zanzibar.

### Anticipated Outputs

Three research papers:

1. An analysis of Covid-19 impacts on IRL in R-LMICs.
2. An analysis of technological, institutional and social barriers and enablers of enhancing IRL in R-LMICs.
3. A critical analysis of UDL and relevant concepts for IRL; future research needs

Reports:

A review of current IRL methods in R-LMICs.

Recommendations and action plan for governments to enhance IRL, co-designed with stakeholders.

### Ethics

Research ethics will be guided by the University of Exeter, Hammersley and Traianou's (2012) overview of ethical issues in education (i.e., respecting privacy, minimising harm, treating people equitably and reciprocity) and the British Education Research Association's (2018) ethical guidelines. A key consideration will be issues surrounding 'western' input in R-LMICs (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007; Muthukrishna and Engelbrecht, 2018).

**Word count (please complete):**



**References (Bibliography)** (not included in your Word count)

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