# Australian and International Journal of Rural Education

Date: 15 February 2017

RE: Higher Education and Digital Media in Rural Australia: The Current Situation for Youth

Dear Krystle

We have submitted your manuscript to two reviewers. The Reviewers have commended the paper for its relevance to the AIJRE and while they have recommendations for substantial revisions they encourage you to continue with the paper. The Review Editors have considered the reviewer reports and ask that you revise your paper to attend to the recommendations. Please include a summary of the changes you make in response to the reviewer comments when you resubmit your paper for a final decision regarding publication.

Please contact us if you are unable to resubmit within four weeks.

**Reviewers' comments:**

**Reviewer #1:**

This paper has the potential to provide an important overview of key digital divide (DD) issues facing young people in rural and regional Australia and implication of these DD for post-school employment and education. I would encourage the authors to undertake much more ‘thinking’ work on the article before revising it. The paper requires major revisions but it could be a nice addition to the digital divide literature in Australia and so I think it is worth persisting to get certain aspects of the paper clarified/corrected.

In its current form the purpose, structure (line of argument) and original contribution of the paper are not clear and/or logically organised. When reading the paper I kept asking myself: Is the paper actually a review and synthesis of the current digital divide (DD) literature between urban and regional Australia in all its manifestations and a discussion of its implications for careers and post-school/higher education of young people? If so then the structure of the paper needs to reflect this logic.

I suggest the authors go back and consider the following:

1. Clarify the exact purpose of the paper and its contribution – what is the gap in the literature?

2. Consider the line of argument or logic of the paper and make sure it is aligned to the paper’s purpose and contribution.

3. Reorganise sections of the paper to reflect the line of argument and conclude with a clear statement of contribution and observations for future action in this area and who is responsible for this action.

The paper does not review enough of the DD literature and it needs to discuss specific aspects of the DD under specific headings. For example: Quality of hardware; number of devices in household; Network reach (proportion of dwellings that the network passes); quality of access (speed, lag & reliability); Affordability especially data; level of digital literacy & competency in the household.

Some of these aspects (barriers) relate to poverty and family background, others to digital policy and service provision, and some to schooling an. There is also the issue of university online education within the context of the DD which could be addressed in a separate section. The paper should be more clearly organised to reflect each aspect of the DD and its driver/influence. It should conclude with a Discussion section which highlights/synthesises key issues/tensions and makes suggestions about what should be done and who should do it (evidence-informed action).

Here are some recent DD reports:

https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Australian-Digital-Inclusion-Index-2016.pdf

http://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Digital-Divide-Policy-Snapshot-2016-Final.pdf

http://acma.gov.au/theACMA/engage-blogs/engage-blogs/Research-snapshots/Regional-Australians-online

The paper should adequately account for any DD literature on Indigenous issues related to rural/regional Australia.

I am concerned with reliance on non-peer reviewed references (eg news articles and, for example, see final dot point of this review). Unless these are used as primary sources for document analysis they need to be replaced with scholarly references.

SPECICIFIC FEEDBACK PER SECTION

Keywords: Add digital divide

Introduction

• There is slippage between use of rural and regional in this section. Choose one and define using standard classificatory system ie ABS ASGS or other appropriate system. The definition given to rural and regional under the Context section is not clear either. It would be better to define clearly up front and then used consistently throughout the paper. Perhaps sticking to regional rather than rural would be clearer and more consistent.

• Phrase ‘significant importance’ is redundant. Just say the significance of…

• If this paragraph is to be reused in a reorganised paper then the citations need to be replaced with more appropriate peer-reviewed ones: “While online learning options are increasingly available for regional and remote people interested in higher education, there are concerns about the quality of internet connectivity in regional areas (National Rural Health Alliance, 2013b), as well as arguments for the benefits of on-campus university attendance (Charles Sturt University, 2009). Many have argued that the majority of learning takes place with human interaction, to which online technologies should support, not replace (Brown, 2013).”

**Reviewer #2:**   
Relevance – I found the article to be very relevant to the themes of the Journal and of interest to a wide range of readers.

Academic merit – the review of literature that constitutes this article was interesting and a useful and timely contribution addressing this important issue. However, the central themes of the paper (factors impacting on participation rates by rural students in tertiary education, and the kinds of tertiary education that should be pursued by these students in a digital economy) did not shine through as much as they might. The third theme (highlighting the need for research into decision making processes) was quite absent. The sections within the ‘consulting the literature’ part of the paper (the bulk of it) were internally coherent, but did not connect well with each other or explicitly with the central themes.

To fix this, the authors need to do four things:

• Remind the readers of the three themes at the end of the Context section (just before the Consulting the Literature section).

• Give an overview in an opening paragraph in the Consulting the Literature section of the sub-sections contained within and (briefly) how they relate to the three themes of the article.

• Connect the paragraphs of each sub-section of Consulting the Literature with these three themes in either the opening or closing sentences. It is particularly important to establish the limitations of the literature being reported in terms of ‘decision making’, if you are going to maintain this as a theme and a concluding position.

Implications for theory – The concluding remarks of your paper were appropriate, but you need to attend to dot point 3 above in order to justify your stance on the need for further research.

Standard of academic writing – your writing was of a very good academic standard. There were one or two small things I noticed that you should attend to (see the attached marked up review of your paper).

Sincerely,  
  
Paula Jervis-Tracey and Elaine Sharplin  
On behalf of the AIJRE Editorial Team