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Introducing *RSC Applied Interfaces*

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To our authors, readers and referees,

I have the distinct honour and rare pleasure of penning this Editorial to highlight the first issue of the first volume of *RSC Applied Interfaces*, celebrating the birth of a new journal. On behalf of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) and of the journal's editorial board, I am pleased to welcome you all to this exciting new venue and to the community we plan to build around it. Having worked with the RSC for close to ten years, previously as Associate Editor of *Journal of Materials Chemistry C* and *Materials Advances*, I am very enthusiastic to take on the role of Founding Editor in Chief of this new journal.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the RSC for giving me this opportunity. Emphasizing that this is a team effort, I would like to acknowledge my fellow Associate Editors, Jianbin Huang, Serena Margadonna and Ryan Richards, who have joined me in this venture and greatly helped in its launch. I am also grateful to the distinguished group of scientists who endorsed the journal by accepting to join our inaugural Advisory Board. Special credit goes to the RSC staff, in particular Jeremy Allen, Kathryn Gempf and Hannah Kerr (and many more) for their efforts in assuring a smooth take off

and for rapidly reaching a steady state. While working with the RSC and its staff over the years, I have come to appreciate the organization's values. In particular, sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion, as well as the promotion of the role of science in society, are well-aligned with my own. These will also be core values for the journal.

The initiative of launching a new journal is both a major challenge and an exciting opportunity. Our admittedly ambitious aim is to become a *leading reference* for cutting edge research in the emerging area of applied interfaces. We aim to consistently publish groundbreaking articles, following a rigorous editorial and peer review process that focuses on novelty and quality. In doing so, I believe the journal can play a prominent role in shaping the research community that studies applied (surfaces and) interfaces and related topics.

Attaining such objectives is not easy, especially considering that we enter an arena in which there are already several successful players, working with rival publishers. While this indicates that *RSC Applied Interfaces* will face stiff competition, at the same time it also shows that it already has a large potential readership and active pool of scientists who can choose this new journal to publish their work related to interfaces and their applications in numerous emerging areas of

technology. Not surprisingly, we already received >250 manuscripts, corresponding to approximately one per calendar day since opening submissions; among these, 29 have been accepted, allowing us to populate three issues starting in early 2024.

Rooted in the chemical sciences, *RSC Applied Interfaces* is devoted to publishing multidisciplinary research papers (see all our categories on the journal's webpage) focusing on interfaces and their applications, drawn from studies at the edge between chemistry, materials science, physics and several areas of engineering. The study of surfaces and interfaces is an ever-expanding field of research: interfaces are ubiquitous in nature and in any modern technology. In addition, the relentless trend towards miniaturization has opened many opportunities, since "nano" means lots of surface and little volume.¹ And while our scope is admittedly broad, we seek to publish work that is also deep – original and thorough. Within our scope, I would like to highlight our interest in the wide-ranging concept of studying structure/property relationships in nanomaterials, enabling their use as building blocks in emerging technologies.

Due to its highly interdisciplinary nature, *RSC Applied Interfaces* has the dual benefit of a very broad scope and of sitting across several groups of RSC journals, specifically the materials

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chemistry journals, the nanoscale journals, *Industrial Chemistry and Materials* and *Catalysis Science and Technology* (and others). In this sense, it is uniquely positioned to collaborate with multiple other RSC journals, for example in transferring manuscripts as well as organizing dedicated symposia for the purpose of shaping relevant communities. To our prospective authors: we emphasize that the transfer of your submission to another journal should not be seen as a downgrade of sorts, but rather, considering the specific merits of the journal(s) that is/are being suggested for transfer, an opportunity of being featured in a more suitable venue, and in this specific case a highly interdisciplinary journal that will be widely read across several disciplines.

This first issue of *RSC Applied Interfaces* is representative of the scientific excellence, breadth of topics and geographical diversity that we embrace. You will find herein papers on metal/ceria catalysts, organic photodetectors, carbon dots for biodiesel synthesis, oxide electrodes used in energy conversion and storage, and much more. These studies originate from 12 countries, namely Austria, Canada, China, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Korea, the UK and the USA. Our first group of authors comprises early career researchers, mid-career scholars and highly distinguished scientists, including National Academy Members. This initial group of papers sets the tone for the articles that will appear in future issues.

A dedicated symposium featuring presentations from authors of the first

issue is currently being considered. We hope that this will just be a first episode of an ongoing series of activities, through which we can effectively contribute to shaping the community. More broadly, I plan for the journal to participate in RSC-wide outreach initiatives, designed to highlight the role of science in modern society.

The world of research has become increasingly competitive during the past few decades. While the number of journals keeps increasing, competition for space in these venues remains very high. This means that we, Editors, and subsequently referees, are tasked with making difficult choices when selecting the manuscripts that are sent out for peer review and ultimately which ones should be published. To our authors, I ask you not to take rejections personally. I know from my own experience that it's easier said than done, yet over time I have come to appreciate the value of learning from reviewers when possible, while setting aside less useful comments. As you well know, clear, concise and persuasive writing makes it easier for us to assess your research and ultimately yields a greater "impact" once your work is published.² I also would like to encourage you to include a compelling and thoughtful cover letter, as this is the first document we read during the initial evaluation and it largely plays a role in determining the fate of your submission.³

To our referees, I thank you for your future service on behalf of the journal, and more broadly, I ask you to be constructive in your comments. Peer review works at its best when we learn from each other, recalling that we are

all contributing to building a huge and hopefully long-lasting mountain of knowledge. An interface represents a "connection", where two systems meet and interact. I hope we can view the publishing process as a way of connecting rather than competing. Our collective efforts will be more effective and worthwhile if we act and work collegially towards this common goal.

Scientific publishing offers a unique opportunity to highlight the role of research in addressing major societal challenges. Here I refer to the importance and urgency of featuring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the scientific community and beyond. As such, I was delighted to see the RSC's emphasis on the SDGs, as my own efforts in research, education and outreach have been increasingly focusing on these objectives. Due to its interdisciplinary nature and applied scope, the research topics covered by this new journal will address several SDGs, including SDG3 (health), SDG6 (water), SDG7 (clean energy), SDG9 (industry), SDG11 (sustainable cities), SDG12 (responsible production and consumption) and SDG13 (climate action), while indirectly addressing other ones, for example SDG4 (education). I hope to read numerous relevant studies on these grand challenges in the pages of *RSC Applied Interfaces*.

Finally, as the ancient Romans used to say, "Ad meliora".

References

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