

EDITORIAL

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## Reflecting on the successes of the first full year of *RSC Sustainability*

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On behalf of my co-editors and all the team at RSC publishing, I would like to thank all of the authors, reviewers and of course readers who have made the first year for *RSC Sustainability* such a success. In this first year, we have published 195 papers from authors based in 30 countries, and by the end of September our published articles had been accessed over 78 600 times. This is very impressive for a new journal and is a testimony to the importance of chemistry for achieving sustainability.

These papers have included original research papers and communications, reviews and perspectives. One group of contributions of which I am particularly proud are the essays from the winners of the Global essay competition: Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for

Sustainability, which can be found in Issue 7. The essays result from a competition organised in collaboration with the International Organization for Chemical Sciences in Development (IOCD) and was open globally to entrants under 35 years of age. The theme for the 2023 competition was: *How can the chemical sciences lead the stewardship of the Earth's element resources?* These insightful essays have much to teach us; I recommend that you read them. To make this easier for you, they have been put into a web collection that you can find at:

<https://pubs.rsc.org/en/journals/articlecollectionlanding?sercode=su&themeid=befab5d4-dcb9-4aad-ac84-1b6f5188008d>

The essay competition has been such a success that we have announced the second competition in what we hope will become an annual series. This year the rules remain the same, but the subject of the essays is: *How can the chemical sciences contribute to 'decarbonizing' the production of energy and to eliminating the generation or release of greenhouse gasses from large-scale manufacturing and agricultural processes?* Please do encourage anyone you know who meets the eligibility criteria to take part.

These essays are important to me for another reason. They represent something that I would like to see more of in *RSC Sustainability* – opinions. Well-evidenced opinion pieces will be

welcomed to build the respectful debates that are needed for us to continually reframe and refine the concept of sustainability moving into the future. The editorial board of *RSC Sustainability* do not view themselves as the arbiters of what should or shouldn't be considered sustainable, and we are certainly not here to police this, but rather we see ourselves as facilitators of this discussion. We have written editorials that convey our views of different aspects of sustainability in the hope that this might stimulate such a discussion. From 2024 onwards, we will have a new article type, called a Forum article, which will serve as a platform for dialogue about these and other important topics.

An important development in the international policy area this year has been the on-going process to establish a United Nations Science-Policy Panel (SPP) for Chemicals, Waste and the Prevention of Pollution. This panel, which will be equivalent to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) will ensure that policymaking will be supported by the best available scientific evidence. The aim is for the SPP to begin its work in 2025. The original principal functions for the panel have been established as:

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“... that the principal functions of the panel should include, among other things: (a) Undertaking “horizon scanning” to identify issues of relevance to policymakers and, where possible, proposing evidence-based options to address them; (b) Conducting assessments of current issues and identifying potential evidence-based options to address, where possible, those issues, in particular those relevant to developing countries; (c) Providing up-to-date and relevant information, identifying key gaps in scientific research, encouraging and supporting communication between scientists and policymakers, explaining and disseminating findings for different audiences, and raising public awareness; (d) Facilitating information-sharing with countries, in particular developing countries seeking relevant scientific information;”

Following a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) meeting on the SPP in Bangkok in January 2023, capacity building between nations was added to the list.

Independent expert scientists on the panel will be interpreting the available scientific evidence to support these functions. *RSC Sustainability* will play an

important role in ensuring high-quality peer-reviewed science can contribute to global knowledge, and we encourage you to submit your solutions-focussed research to enable these ends.

This brings me to another paper that we have published: *An actionable definition and criteria for “sustainable chemistry” based on literature review and a global multisectoral stakeholder working group* by

Amy Cannon, Sally Edwards, Molly Jacobs, Jonathon W. Moir, Monika A. Roy and Joel A. Tickner (*RSC Sustain.*, 2023, **1**, 2092, <https://doi.org/10.1039/D3SU00217A>).

I should immediately declare an interest in this paper, because I was one of the international panel of experts who were consulted as part of this process. And it is not only for this reason that I feel conflicted. The purist academic in me believes strongly that to define a discipline is to kill it. Any intellectual endeavour needs to grow and change if it is to flourish, so perhaps you can describe it as it is now, but this is a very different to defining it. However, all of us working towards a sustainable future cannot ignore that we interact with other parts of society. This paper describes a process and outcome that was directed at others –

politicians, investors, *etc.* These groups do need a definition that they can use to inform their decision making. So, the purist academic in me needs to get over himself and recognise the importance of this kind of work and the excellent contribution that this paper has made. I commend it to you as an interesting read regardless of the subject of your own research.

As we move forward into our second year we will be working hard to grow and develop the journal. One important tool we have for this is to make themed collections of papers on a particular subject. We have several themed collections open for submissions right now: (1) Energy Materials Redesign, Reuse and Repurposing, (2) CO<sub>2</sub> Conversion and (3) The Circular Economy. These are open for submissions until May, so please do contribute your work in these subjects. There will be more themed collections in the future; please feel free to suggest subjects for these.

Finally, I would like to thank you again for your support of *RSC Sustainability* during its first year and look forward to working for you all to make its second year every bit as successful as its first.

