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Born in 2023 as a journal of the “Materials” portfolio, *RSC Applied Interfaces* now celebrates its first year of publishing, consisting of six issues published every other month in 2024, with a total of 115 articles. The new year starts with a splash, featuring an excellent lineup of articles in this volume 2, issue 1.

Interface chemistry, physics, and biology are central to a wealth of applications, reflected in our 136 published papers (including Advance Articles), which report advances in materials for energy harvesting and conversion (<https://doi.org/10.1039/D4LF00211C>, <https://doi.org/10.1039/D4LF00225C>, <https://doi.org/10.1039/D3LF00094J>) environmental remediation (<https://doi.org/10.1039/D4LF00171K>), and 2D and nanomaterial interfaces (<https://doi.org/10.1039/D3LF00194F>), including metamaterials (<https://doi.org/10.1039/D4LF00127C>) and patterning methods such as lithography (<https://doi.org/10.1039/D3LF00248A>), see Fig. 1 for a graphical representation of submissions. The

## The first year of *RSC Applied Interfaces*: a retrospective

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published content is also representative of the broad geographical diversity of the scientific community (Fig. 2).

In line with our mission of supporting the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals, we have, with our

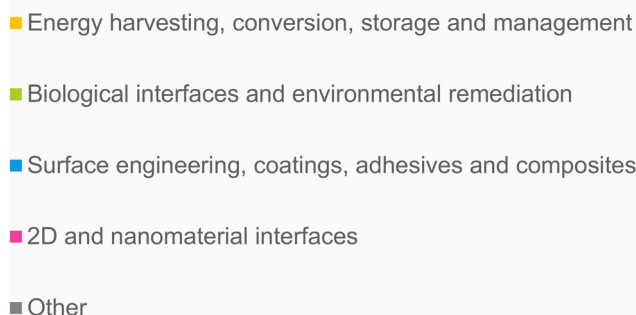
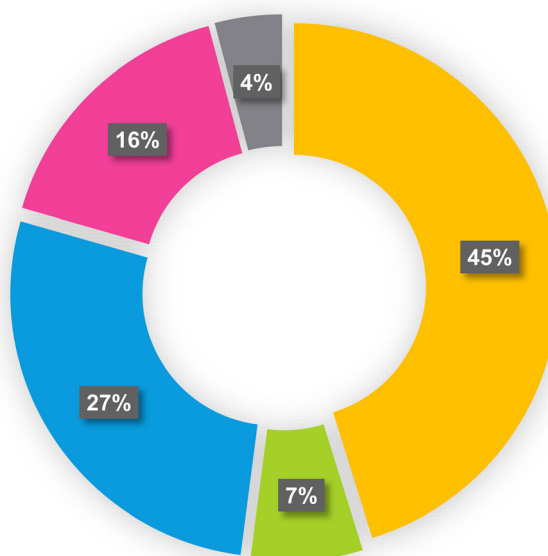


Fig. 1 Figure showing the percentage of *RSC Applied Interfaces* accepted manuscripts based upon article topic, with a date of acceptance in the journal during 2024.

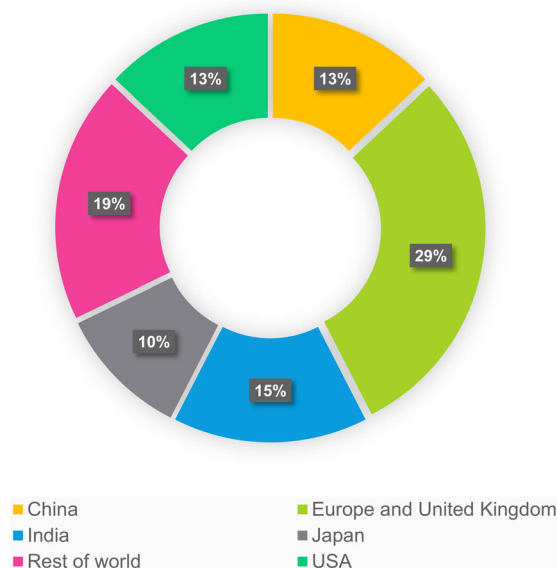
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**Fig. 2** Figure showing the percentage of *RSC Applied Interfaces* accepted manuscripts based upon the countries/region of the submitted authors, with a date of acceptance in the journal during 2024.

minor, or rather major? In both instances, the reviewer's comments should provide sufficient detail for the authors to fully understand what is expected and how they can edit and improve their manuscript and adequately respond to the concerns that are being raised.

We also emphasize that transfers are an important component of the peer review process and should be kept in mind by reviewers. This is an expanding aspect of publishing that can be very beneficial to the dissemination of science that could dramatically improve efficiency if taken into consideration at the onset by authors, editors and reviewers. If a manuscript is scientifically sound but would be more appropriate in another journal, it is most helpful if the review addresses both of these points. As editors we aim to help authors disseminate their work in the best venue to maximize their impact while also being mindful of not over-burdening the reviewer pool. For reference, since *RSC Applied Interfaces* has launched, we have received 47 manuscripts *via* transfer, while recommending 202 for transfer to other *Royal Society of Chemistry* journals. In this context, reviews associated with manuscripts being transferred in (usually from more established journals) should ideally provide insight into the validity of the science and, separately, the novelty to the field.

Review articles are also important contributions that describe the state of the art, provide key insights and identify promising perspectives. In assessing review articles it is important for reviewers to indicate clearly what key insights and value the readership will gain from the manuscript. Furthermore, it is important to indicate whether the review is comprehensive in coverage or if there are gaps that must be addressed. In this regard, it is also very helpful if the authors provide the reader (and thereby also the reviewers and editors) some indication as to how the review differs and/or complements others on similar subject areas (with references). As editors, we observe that when authors clearly address their

companion journal *RSC Applied Polymers*, highlighted in our first year of themed collections accepted articles in the areas of Good Health and Wellbeing, Affordable and Clean Energy, Responsible Consumption and Production, and Clean Water and Sanitation.

In this initial phase, filling journal pages with quality content has not been difficult. Our greatest challenge so far has rather been to engage competent and reliable reviewers. Authors are always keen to receive feedback fairly rapidly and expect comments received through peer review to be helpful (rightly so). However, when we invite scientists to review manuscripts, only a small number respond, and even fewer agree to take on the assignment. The policies of the Royal Society of Chemistry mandate that at least two independent reviewer reports are required for an Editor to issue a decision. It happens increasingly and alarmingly often that we need to invite more than twenty (twenty!) reviewers before we eventually receive two reports in a reasonable time frame of a few weeks. This trend is not related to *RSC Applied Interfaces* being a new journal; we have observed similar timelines when serving as Editors for other journals and publishers.

We would like to take this Editorial as an opportunity to remind our readership that participating in peer review is a two-way street. While we are at it, we would also like to emphasize what we hope to receive in terms of reviewer reports, specifically what we consider to be a "good" report.

While a peer review exercise is essentially binary, meaning that the reviewer is essentially asked to recommend "yes" or "no", a good report should be insightful and constructive. In this sense, negative comments should be avoided, unless they are accompanied with detailed suggestions on how the work can be improved. Generic statements ("this work is not sufficiently novel" or worse, "this has been done before") are also not appreciated, unless proper context is given: in fairness, "this has already been reported" should then be accompanied by "see the following references".

To a first degree of approximation, the reviewer should highlight whether they think the contents are sufficiently novel to warrant further consideration; again, with proper context. If the answer is yes, then the remaining question is, can it be accepted as is, or should it be revised? And in the latter case, should the revision be



review's fit in the context of the broader literature, they tend to provide a focus and perspective that is much more beneficial to their field and the entire ecosystem than simply summarizing the literature on a topic.

As we look forward to our second year and the future of *RSC Applied Interfaces*, we aim to collaborate with the community to provide a platform for scientific dissemination that is a 'must see'. The reviewers and their

engagement are an essential component in helping shape this forum and we are hopeful that this editorial clarifies our expectations and can help them to help us.

