

Cite this: *RSC Sustainability*, 2025, 3, 16

Reflecting on the successes of *RSC Sustainability* in 2024 and looking forward to 2025

Tom Welton

DOI: 10.1039/d4su90066a

rsc.li/rscsus

On behalf of my co-editors and all the team at *RSC Sustainability*, I would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and readers who have made the second year for *RSC Sustainability* as much of a success as was its first. This year, we have published over 300 articles from authors based in 36 countries, across a wide range of sustainability topics. For this editorial, I decided to delve into this in more detail.

In my first editorial, I invited our authors to submit manuscripts on solutions-focused research in the chemical sciences dedicated to solving sustainability challenges and to explain how their research does this in our Sustainability Spotlight section. We chose very deliberately to not be overly prescriptive in how these are written, wanting to see how our authors thought about their work. These Sustainability Spotlights have proven to be a mine of information.

Most authors have chosen to name which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) their work is relevant to. Over the two years that we have been going, specific SDGs have been mentioned just over 900 times in our published Sustainability Spotlights (I did not presume to allocate SDGs where authors had not done so themselves). You can see the distribution of these in Fig. 1.

It is clear to see that the most commonly cited SDG is SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). This was probably to be expected, given that it is here where we find specific targets such as sustainable management and use of natural resources (Target 12.2), responsible management of chemicals and waste (Target 12.4) and substantially reducing waste generation (Target 12.5). I almost wonder which of our published works could not contribute to SDG 12. Also frequently cited are SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy). These SDGs also

frequently appeared together, showing how action in one SDG often has impacts in others. During this exercise, I found looking at which SDGs appeared together very enlightening, as I could see those interactions between different SDGs emerge. I would ask our authors who only cited one SDG in their Sustainability Spotlight to reflect on this and to think more expansively in the future.

Of course, I also need to turn to those SDGs that have appeared less frequently. There are only two SDGs that have not appeared at all, SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). I do hold out

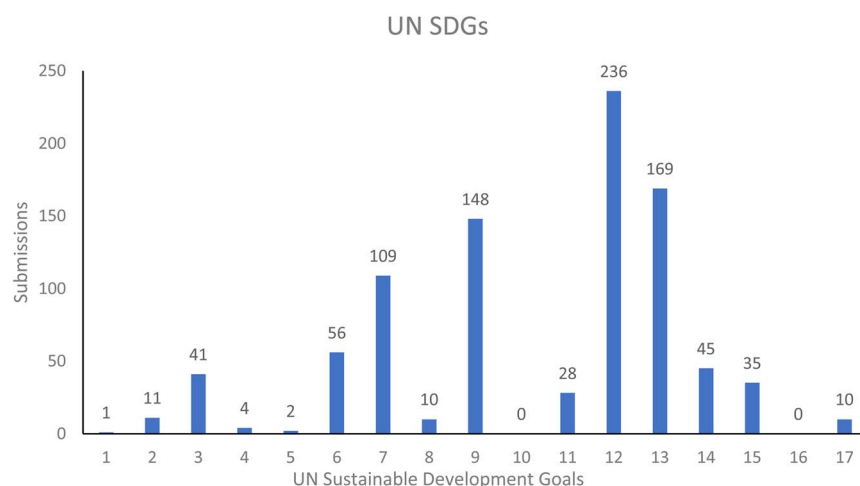


Fig. 1 Numbers of submissions mentioning each of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Imperial College London, UK



hope that this will change; particularly we welcome contributions that are focussed on the policy implications of sustainability research in the chemical sciences, which could impact both of these. This analysis did hold one surprise for me, which is the lack of contributions that involved SDG 4 (quality education). SDG 4 was only cited 4 times. Yet, I know that there is a huge amount of excellent work being done on education for and about sustainability; I would like to see more about this in *RSC Sustainability*.

The undoubted strong link between Sustainable Chemistry and the SDGs means that you will now see an added question at submission that will ask authors to select all the SDGs that are relevant to their work so we can analyse this more closely in the future. This will also enable us to set up collections for each SDG, so that those who are interested in particular SDGs will be able to access research on these more easily.

Another way that we asked our authors to describe their research was to select a Sustainability Topic. You can see the distribution of these in Fig. 2.

Again, it is unsurprising that the two greatest contributions come from sustainable chemistry (31%), closely followed by sustainable materials (29%), with strong contributions from sustainable methods (12%) and sustainable engineering (9%). The lowest contribution from our specified topics comes from sustainability metrics (1%). Finding ways to measure sustainability is vital to being able to monitor and so achieve sustainability. We would very much like to encourage more contributions on this topic in the future.

It is invidious to pick out individual papers for special attention, but I would like to once again bring to your attention our *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability* essay competition. This essay competition is organised in collaboration with the International Organization for Chemical Sciences in Development (IOCD) and is open globally to entrants under 35 years of age. The theme for the 2024 competition was: *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? The 2024 winning essays can be found in Volume 2 Issue 12, where you will find 7 excellent essays that have much to show us.

This essay competition is to become an annual fixture of *RSC Sustainability*. The 2025 subject for the essays is: *From waste to wealth: how chemical sciences can sustainably transform waste into valuable products*. You can find all the details of how to apply here:

Global essay competition: Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability – RSC Sustainability (RSC Publishing)

Please do encourage anyone you know who meets the eligibility criteria to take part.

In both of my two previous beginning of the year editorials, I told you about a process to establish a United Nations Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste and the Prevention of Pollution. I was hoping to be able to tell you that this process had come to a successful conclusion in 2024. Unfortunately, this has not yet happened. The work on this continues and I hope that I will be able to give you better news soon. Nonetheless, *RSC Sustainability* continues to play its role in ensuring that the high-quality peer-reviewed science that will be needed by this panel when it starts its work is disseminated through open-access publication, and we encourage you to submit your solutions-focussed research to enable these ends.

In the upcoming third year of *RSC Sustainability*, we will be continuing to grow and develop the journal. Our themed collections on **The Circular Economy**, **CO₂ Conversion**, and **Energy Materials Redesign, Reuse and Repurposing** are now closed for submissions (of course we remain open to submissions in these areas in the future) and are now online. In 2025, these will be joined by themed collections on **Defossilising Chemical Industries**, **Electrocatalysis for Energy Conversion Reactions**, **Industrial Perspectives**, and **Green and Sustainable Batteries** (together with other RSC journals). If these are relevant to you, please do consider submitting your research to these. There will be more

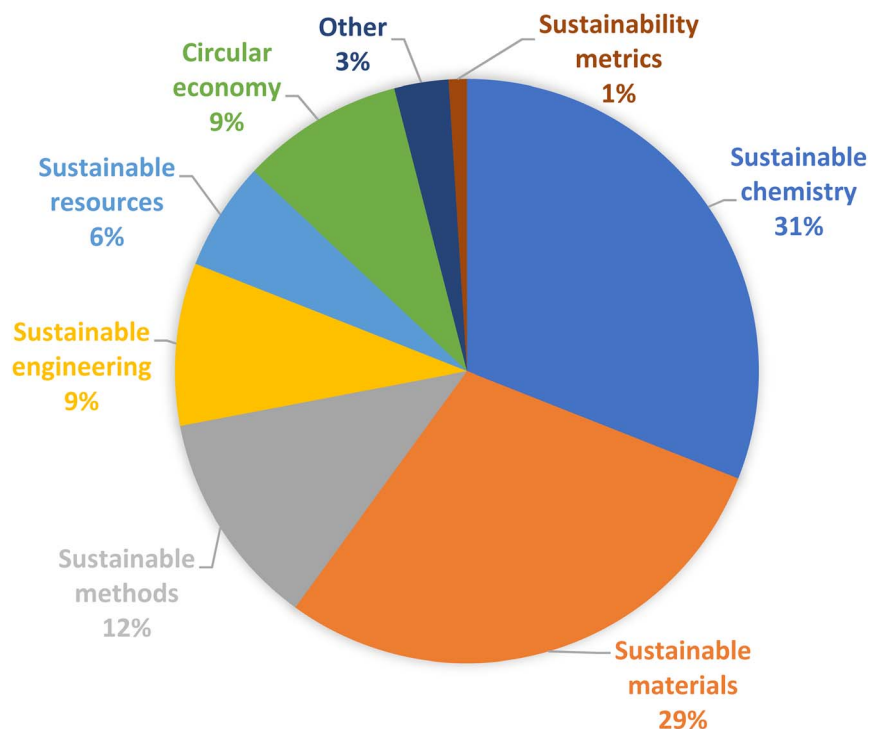


Fig. 2 Distribution of Sustainability Topics amongst submissions.



RSC Sustainability

themed collections in the future; please feel free to suggest subjects for these.

Finally, I, my fellow co-editors and colleagues from RSC Publishing will be attending a number of conferences during 2025 to meet with the community of chemical scientists working in

sustainability research. If you see us, please do come over to introduce yourself and discuss your interests and ideas for the journal.

Have a very happy and successful 2025.

