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Global essay competition: *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability*

2026 Competition: Call for essays

The International Organization for Chemical Sciences in Development (IOCD), in collaboration with the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), is launching the fourth year of its annual essay competition on the role of the chemical sciences in sustainability. The competition is open globally to entrants under 35 years of age. The theme for the 2026 competition is:

How can the chemical sciences ensure sustainable access to clean water for all needs?

After shortlisting based on relevance and quality, essays will be grouped into seven regions for the selection of winners, based on the entrant's country of normal residence. Each Regional Winner will receive a prize of US\$500 and their entries will be published in *RSC Sustainability*. The shortlisted essays selected as Finalists will be collected in an annual compendium, *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability*, published as a PDF online and available on IOCD's website. See [here](#) for details of the competitions, finalists and winners from 2023–2025. The seven regional groupings (as updated by the **World Bank** in 2025) are:

- East Asia & Pacific
- Europe & Central Asia

- Latin America & Caribbean
- Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan & Pakistan
- North America
- South Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Theme: Broad flexibility will be applied in assessing the approach taken by entrants to framing the theme, which might be addressed, for example, through (but not limited to) contexts such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, specific international challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss or plastics pollution, or critical resource shortages and the need for material stewardship. Whatever framing is adopted, essays will be judged on how well they highlight the importance of the chemical sciences for solving sustainability challenges, as well as realism about what more needs to be done. Entrants are encouraged to take a broad, global perspective, including reflecting on the intersection of science, society and policy aspects, rather than to describe a particular scientific advance in great technical detail. Entrants should create their own title for their essay, related to the theme set.

2. Essay constraints and timelines: Essays MUST NOT exceed 1500 words of main text. Literature references to indicate sources MUST be given, using the RSC authors' style guide and original

tables or figures may be included, with the text of all these not counted as part of the limit of 1500 words. The essay itself should be self-explanatory, without requiring further background reading. Entries will initially be screened for compliance with competition rules (including entrant's age, main text word count, relevance to the set theme, and conformity with the publication requirements of *RSC Sustainability*) and then reviewed for shortlisting. Entries found to have evidence of plagiarism, or of using artificial intelligence in the primary writing of the text, will be disqualified.

Eligibility is limited to entrants who are under 35 years of age on the submission deadline day of 31 March 2026. The aim is for selection of shortlisted candidates to be completed around the end of May and the regional finalists determined around the end of June 2026.

Prizes: The regional winners of the annual competition will each receive a cash prize of US\$500 from IOCD and a Winner's Certificate, and their entries will be published in *RSC Sustainability*. The other shortlisted competitors selected as Finalists of the Competition will each receive a Finalist's Certificate and their entries will be published by IOCD in the annual compendium, *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability*.



Submissions: Essays must be submitted in English as a Word document, not later than midnight GMT on 31 March 2026 to essay@iocd.org accompanied by a completed Entry Form, which is available on IOCD's website along with the detailed rules of the Competition at https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/Essay/competition2026.html.

