



Higher Education Sustainability Initiative

HESI Action Group: SDG Publishers Compact Fellows Annual Report, 2024

Report submitted by Debra Rowe, Sally Wilson and Jo Wixon

The HESI SDG Publishers Compact Fellows action group works within HESI to meet [HESI's aim](#) to “enhance the role of the higher education sector in advancing sustainable development by facilitating multi-stakeholder discussions, actions, and the dissemination of best practices”. The action group meets weekly and works with academic publishers, editors, researchers, practitioners and policymakers to help facilitate the journey towards a publishing ecosystem that addresses societal sustainability challenges and supports human progress. Under the aegis of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative, Fellows operate as both a think tank and action group. The group develops and provides to all HESI members and the wider higher education and publishing communities practical tools and actionable guidance that publishers, editors, researchers and practitioners need to prioritize SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in the research agenda and in educational materials while improving connections between practice and research.

Deliverables/outputs

Driving SDG Action. In 2024, the HESI action group updated and expanded the [Top Action Tips](#) to enhance alignment with the SDGs throughout the wider research community. Two new Top Action Tips were added:

- [APC Waivers and Discounts](#) - These tips complement our Top Action Tips on Equity (released in 2023), by providing guidance to authors on how to understand if they are eligible for, and how to request, article processing charge (APC) Waivers and Discounts. There are also recommendations to Editors and Publishers for increased simplicity and clarity of these offers and on the ethical considerations of administering them.

- [Co-creating Research with Practitioners](#) - These tips advise researchers on collaborating with practitioners and jointly generating knowledge by involving stakeholders from various sectors throughout the research process to ensure real-world needs and challenges are addressed effectively. For editors and publishers, recommendations include supporting authors to increase the impacts of work that has been co-created with professionals or addresses their needs, and including practitioners' perspectives and research in their journals.

Some key examples of the practical tips provided across the Top Action Tips include:

- [editors ensuring authors share practical implications in their abstracts](#);
- [authors including a plain language summary for distribution to practitioners and policymakers](#);
- [researchers connecting with practitioners and policymakers to inform the relevance of their research agendas](#);
- [article processing fees, discounts and waivers](#).

To increase the reach of the Top Action Tips, the collection is hosted (open access) on the [Science Open](#) discovery platform. We also shared the Top Action Tips to the IPA SDG Dashboard, in support of the SDG Publishers Compact 1000 Actions campaign [here](#). Through a new collaboration with University World News, to increase the reach into academia, the Top Action Tips were also covered in "[New tips for academic publishers aim to boost SDG delivery](#)", with a quote from our convenor Debra Rowe "Just imagine a world where the practitioners, publishers, policymakers, researchers and educators are all talking to each other.../...getting much more useful information to the people who need it."

Tracking Progress and Challenges. In this HESI group's collaboration with EASE, we ran a survey to understand the impact of the [SDG Publishers Compact](#) and the [EASE Environmental Manifesto](#). The peer reviewed paper detailing the findings was [published open access in ESE Journal](#) in October 2024 and the results were [presented to the EASE membership](#). The survey highlighted the need to raise awareness of the Compact among small publishers and journal editors, and to allocate more resources for tracking progress. Challenging commitments include annual reporting, raising supplier awareness, and dedicating budgets.

Following on from these findings, EASE is producing an SDGs Checklist with practical steps for SDG action designed for publishers of all sizes and individual journals, which can be used to baseline and track progress. Collaboration between the HESI SDG Compact Fellows and EASE will continue in 2025.

Enhancing Education and Standards. In November 2024, this HESI action group co-organized with two other HESI action groups and facilitated a convening of accreditation and quality assurance agencies to discuss the importance of including education for sustainable development in accreditation, curricula, and quality standards. We compiled and shared resources and are now supporting the organization of a community of practice.

Outreach activities

Fellows raise awareness and communicate with stakeholders across the fields of higher education and scholarly communications through the following means:

- a) a regular newsletter,
- b) collaborating with partner organizations on events focussed on the sharing of practical implications of research to drive change,
- d) speaking at UN events, such Commission for Social Development (CSocD), Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) and High-level Political Forum (HLPF) conference side events,
- e) presenting at publishing industry events, in 2024 including the [Researcher to Reader conference](#), the [London Book Fair](#), [STM Sustainability Days](#) and the [APE conference](#),
- f) two of the Fellows are co-chairs of ALPSP's SDGs and Publishing SIG,
- g) building our [LinkedIn presence](#), significantly increasing our followers,
- h) the action group [website](#), including a refreshed [events page](#) with recordings, slide decks and resource materials from our events,
- i) through publications, such as University World News, see [HESI pushes for sustainability criteria in accreditation](#), [New tips for academic publishers aim to boost SDG delivery](#), and quotes in [Poverty, gender lag in global SDG research output – Study](#).

Planned activities

Equity. The group's plans for 2025 have pivoted towards enhancing equity in higher education. We are collaborating with the online HE education publication outlet University World News (UWN) to seek support for initiatives that promote equity. A key area of focus is improving equity in relation to article processing/publishing charges levied by publishers in support of Open Access. The group continues to issue supplementary guidance, including information on [discounts and waivers](#), to ensure that all researchers have the opportunity to disseminate their work without financial barriers.

Accessibility. The group will continue to strive to make research on sustainability more accessible by encouraging the inclusion of implications for practitioners and policymakers in abstracts, and advocating wider use of plain language summaries that are distributed to practitioner and policymaker associations. To enhance the practical application of research, this HESI action group is designing a robust model framework that fosters connections between researchers, journal editors, practitioners, and policymakers. This model will facilitate the

exchange of knowledge and ideas, ensuring that research findings are effectively translated into policies and practices that benefit society. The group is considering building a database of practitioner and policymaking organizations and associations for editors to share with their authors, enabling them to reach out to these stakeholder groups and bridge the gap between academia and practice.

Engagement. In our efforts to support impactful research and initiatives, this HESI action group recognizes the importance of collaborating with credible and aligned foundations that can require top action tips in their funding programs. We will implement a vetting process to identify and partner with foundations that share HESI's commitment to sustainable development and the betterment of society. This will ensure that collaborations are both effective and aligned with HESI.

Inclusion. Inclusion remains a cornerstone of the work. This group is excited to extend the reach of the Fellows into Africa, with an invitation to new members from Southern Africa. This expansion will bring diverse perspectives and expertise into the HESI community, enriching collective efforts and impact. By fostering inclusivity, we can better address the unique challenges and opportunities within the African context.

Climate Migrants Content Collection. Recognizing the growing issue of climate-induced migration, this group is committed to creating a new curated content collection on Climate Migrants. This collection will provide valuable insights and resources on the challenges faced by climate migrants and the strategies needed to support them. By highlighting this critical issue, we aim to raise awareness and drive action towards solutions that protect and empower those affected by climate change.

Dissemination. To amplify impact and drive positive change towards achieving the SDGs, fellows will continue contributing articles and speaking at conferences and events to raise awareness and foster dialogue.

Timeline

Short term:

- **Community.** Build communities to drive change and shift systems
- **Standards.** Establish and share best practice and standards

Long term:

- **System Shift.** Drive and demonstrate systems change.

Collaborations

Existing collaborators ([featured on the website](#)) include the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (STM), and ICLEI. We will also seek active collaborations with ratings and rankings organizations.

ALPSP hosts a list of SDGs and Publishing resources on their [website](#) and runs a popular ‘SDGs and Publishing’ special interest group (SIG), supported by the Fellows. We also co-host events and promote each other’s events or outputs that drive action towards the SDGs; and work together to increase the number of SDG Publishers Compact signatories among ALPSP’s members. In September, the [Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers](#) held their conference in Manchester, UK. Their special interest group (SIG) on the [SDGs and Publishing](#), which has two of our Fellows among its Co-Chairs, ran a panel session “[Taking Action on Sustainability](#)”, which encouraged the staff of publishers large and small to take SDG action and to encourage their publishing houses to do the same, providing practical examples and guidance to take back to their offices.

Several of the Fellows are members of two ‘task & finish’ groups of **STM’s** Social Responsibility Committee. In 2024, this HESI action group collaborated on the development of Level 3 of [STM’s SDGs Roadmap](#) (which supports publishers in taking SDG action and signing the SDG Publishers Compact) and the release of an [SDGs Classifier Demonstrator](#) (a tool which assesses titles and abstracts of articles to map them to the SDGs, aiding authors, readers and publishers in identifying and increasing awareness of SDG-relevant content). The initial request for STM to convene an industry group to work on a way to classify SDG content came from the HESI SDG Publishers Compact Fellows, following a survey we ran that established there was a need for this across our industry, so we are delighted to see this tool being released for public testing.

Membership

The Fellows function as an HESI action group (and think tank) focused entirely on promoting the SDGs in higher education. While not all Fellows attend every meeting, we continue to meet once a week as a group, and at any given time, smaller subgroups may be working on individual projects, such as the development of new guidance. Individual Fellows take responsibility for communicating with partner organizations / collaborators and advising the larger group on issues such as marketing and outreach.

Learn more about the fellows and the list of organizations involved [here](#).

Alphabetical (by first name) list of Fellows in 2024:

Andrew Bostjancic	Claire Jackson
Arend Küster	Clarice Martel
Caroline Lock	Dana Compton
Chirag Jay Patel	Debra Rowe (Co-chair and Founder)

Derek M. Lough

Marilyn McDonald Hendricks

Gerald Beasley

Nicola Jones

Hannah Ells

Nikita Lad

Hilary Belleville

Rachel Burley

Holly Koppel

Rachel Martin

Jason Maitland

Raji Sivaraman

Jo Havemann

Ratna Lindawati Lubis

Jo Wixon

Rebecca Kirk

Liz Allen

Roger Worthington (deceased)

Lucas Toutloff

Sally Wilson

Matt Giampoala

Stuart Cooper

Natalie Webster

Victoria Gardner

In Memoriam: Dr Roger Worthington

Members of the HESI SDG Publishers Compact Fellows Action Group note the passing of our co-chair, Dr. Roger Worthington, on October 16, 2024. Roger engaged in nearly every aspect of our work, supporting conference presentations, newsletters, and Top Action Tips. A former adjunct faculty member at Yale, he joined the Fellows in 2021. He was a consultant in ethics, global health, and sustainable development. Roger's recent work supporting climate refugees and migrants was groundbreaking. He will be greatly missed.
