IIER Editorial 36(3): (i) SDGs for IIER in 2027; (ii) Miscellanea

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(i) SDGs for IIER in 2027

The acronym SDG is well known to many from the work of the United Nations in promoting *Sustainable Development Goals* [1., 2.]. For this editorial, we invoke SDGs to signal a pressing need to develop a *sustainable* approach to the growing problems for IIER that were outlined in Editorial 36(2) [3.], especially the problem of *Numbers received increasing*. Our current template for advice to authors of articles 'rejected editorially' (defined in [3.], Table 1) includes the new and revised sentences:

> Thank you for the interest in IIER, logged as submission #xxx, but we regret to inform you that during August-September 2026 we have to impose an unusually high rejection rate and a severely constrained level of feedback.
> ...
> Please send your article to another journal.
> ...
> During 2025 IIER averaged 76.6 submissions per month, with an increase to 106.1 submissions per month average encountered for January-September 2026. This sharp increase has created problems.

The months June (127 submissions), July (119), August (104) and September (106) 2026 could be an ominous portent. As 2027 may be a critical year for IIER's sustainability, we are hoping for good progress on three matters or 'goals' that could be important steps towards reducing the current 'avalanche' of submissions:

a. Commissioning IIER special issues as potential foundations for 'sibling' journals
After initiating the 'sibling journals' idea in Editorial 35(1) [4], Editorial 36(1) explored "... potential specifications for such a special issue or issues of IIER", though conceding that "... the commissioning of an IIER special issue is very much a work in progress" [5]. Editorial 36(2) noted that "... we do need to reserve more time for pursuing the commissioning of special issues of IIER as a potential practical step towards the eventual emergence of one or several new journals" [3]. Recent contributions in IIER's 'invited guest editorial' category have encouraged us to undertake a determined testing of the 'sibling' journals possibility. As Cheema and Pervez (2026) commented, "... well-established journals could explore the creation of region-focused sister journals or supplementary outlets that provide additional publication opportunities while maintaining comparable standards of rigor." [6]

Will this path of commissioning IIER special issues as potential foundations for 'sibling' journals serve us as hoped for? That is, improved author satisfaction arising from improved chances of acceptance; faster progression to publication; and no imposition of APCs; etc., whilst also providing workload relief for IIER and similar journals suffering

from 'avalanches' of submissions? Rather than trying to answer 'yes', 'maybe', 'don't know', or 'no', let's regard this as a hypothesis that warrants a very determined testing during 2027.

b. Rejuvenating and expanding IIER's Editorial Board
This goal is like a corollary for 'sibling journals', as each special issue would require "... a guest editor and associate editors, a guest editorial board and guest reviewers who can undertake all or almost all of the work." [5]. Therefore potential special issue editors would become invitees to IIER's Editorial Board, functioning as key facilitators for their own and prospective future special issues, and for 'siblings' that may emerge from successful special issue experiences. An 'internationalisation' of IIER's Editorial Board would align with the 'internationalisation' of IIER's authorship that has proceeded for some decades.

c. Refining the criteria we use for 'rejected editorially' decision-making
Collectively, the authors contributing in IIER's 'invited guest editorial' category [7] have encouraged us to strive for sustainability. Some have mainly explored purposes and possibilities, including Phuong (2025) "Advancing equity and inclusion" [8]; Soodmand Afshar and Ranjbar (2025) "... nurture a culture of intellectual authenticity" [9]; and Espinosa (2025) "The fight for open educational research" [10]. Others have mainly explored challenges, as in Groenewald and Teise (2024) "... immense pressure to do research and publish) [11] and Rogers et al. "Inside the academic publishing pressure cooker" [12]. Oo and Alonzo (2026) offered a plea for a more sustainable research culture:

> A more sustainable research culture therefore requires pluralistic approaches to evaluation, recognising that valuable scholarship may contribute internationally, nationally, locally, professionally, or to particular communities in different ways. [13]

As the category 'rejected editorially' constitutes a high proportion of IIER's review outcomes (90.5% in 2025, see Table 1 in [3]), we could look for improvements in IIER's advice to authors about the criteria being applied. The scope for improvement may be illustrated by quoting some commonly used paragraphs from our library of templates.

> We recommend that authors self-assess the quality of a proposed submission, by searching IIER (see http://www.iier.org.au/about/iier-search.html) using keywords that are relevant for your article. The main question will be, "Can I do as well as, or perhaps even better than, similar articles already published in IIER?" Another important question will be, "Is my topic, country context, research question, or some other aspect under-represented in IIER?" *[many authors may feel unable to make such self-assessments, leaving it to an assessment by editorial staff]*

> Under IIER's current circumstances of high submission rates and acceptance rates falling to under 10%, we are becoming more limited in the extent to which

> we can cater for topics that have been relatively well-represented in recent issues of IIER. This is the case with submission #xxx, a good standard article which we suggest placing with a journal in [insert a field] or [insert field] teaching and learning. *["relatively well-represented" tends to be a subjective judgment]*
>
> Under IIER's current circumstances of high submission rates and acceptance rates falling to under 10%, we are becoming more limited in the extent to which we can cater for topics that are more specialised from IIER's perspective as a 'generalist' journal, such as [insert topic 1 and insert topic 2]. This is the case with submission #xxx, a high standard article which we suggest placing with a journal covering topics in [insert topic 1 and insert topic 2]. *["more specialised" tends to be a subjective judgment]*

Another tendency towards subjective judgments can arise with reviewing question, "Does submission #xxx present a significant issue in educational research?" To illustrate one of the dilemmas in this area, the significance of an issue tends to be associated with the number of articles published on said issue, but that perspective conflicts with the "relatively well-represented" perspective. Refining IIER's communication to authors about the criteria we use for 'rejected editorially' will be a lengthy, ongoing task. Knowing this , one step already taken is use of a 'fast reject' procedure. Our current template for advice to authors of articles 'rejected editorially' (partially quoted above) includes the sentence:

> Facing increasing periods of delay between submission, acceptance and publication, we feel that it is fairest to give authors prompt advice about starting on the difficult task of finding another journal.

In hoped-for-effect, this is saying to prospective authors that although we cannot provide a highly precise description of criteria and how these may be applied to your submission, we can at least give you reasonably reliable and prompt advice that enables an immediate start on the next step: find another journal. Very unfortunately, the descriptor "difficult task" is often appropriate.

(ii) Editorial miscellanea

a. Free reference and citation verification access for editors

Very occasionally, I (RA) will follow up on an 'unsolicited' email. The subject line quoted above was sufficiently tempting because it links to a high volume, very time-consuming task. To illustrate, the 22 regular articles in IIER 36(3) contain about 1240 references, with average 56 per article (range 35 to 97, median 54). All verified during very time-consuming copy editing. The sender of "Free reference and citation verification...", ReferenceVerify [https://referenceverify.com/], explained the service being offered:

> Dear Editor,
> During the evaluation of a manuscript, whether the cited sources genuinely exist, the accuracy of their bibliographic information, the current publication status of the cited works, and whether they actually support the claims made in the text

> are important areas to check. With the growing use of AI-assisted writing tools, fabricated or erroneous references, citations to retracted works, and studies published in journals whose reliability warrants separate scrutiny have become matters requiring greater attention in editorial processes.
> The Citation Verification tool on referenceverify.com, which we developed for these needs, examines an entire manuscript or only its reference list and:
> *[this introduction was followed by 957 words that showed an expert knowledge of citation verification]*

However, "Free..." is available only for very small scale use [https://referenceverify.com/pricing]. For IIER editorial work, the "Pro" level at $12/month could suit. To illustrate a further limitation, one article in IIER 36(3) was an especially time-consuming 'delayer'. It contained 22 references deleted due to 'not cited in article text', of which 9 were deemed 'probably not sufficiently relevant, deletion sustained' and 13 were deemed 'relevant, have potential for reinstatement, should follow up' - which a Citation Verification tool cannot do - it is a follow-up-with-authors problem, a copy editor job.

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