

DSA engagement guidelines

The role of development studies in global crises

For the UK-based Development Studies Association, a learned society among development studies academics and practitioners, we have [a clear mandate](#) stated in our constitution: to (i) “advance knowledge of the alternative processes and methods of socio-economic change” commonly referred to as development studies, “through interdisciplinary studies, meetings, and conferences, and (ii) disseminate information about research results, operation and practice, course curricula, and training schemes.”

Within this, we recognise that there are global issues that cannot be ignored by the development studies community or the association. In 2019 the DSA’s trustees (the Council) agreed the following principles to help guide if and when the DSA as an organisation engages in issues through the mechanisms described below. These principles are:

1. Does DSA as a learned society have a direct and legitimate interest in this issue?
2. Is the DSA in a strong position to add value to debates around this issue?
3. Is DSA engagement on this issue likely to help raise the profile and standing of development studies?

Unfortunately, the extent to which the DSA as an organisation engages with national and global issues is somewhat constrained:

- by its status as a charity, and adhering to actions within its charitable mandate
- by the organisation’s limited knowledge and resources (especially compared to its institutional members); the communication support is part-time, and Council members are volunteers.

We therefore encourage members who may have deeper understanding of issues, or links to relevant actions, to bring these to the DSA for discussion and potential support.

How members can leverage the DSA as a platform to advance the understanding of crises in the world

While the DSA’s Council may raise specific issues, external affairs and global crises at Council meetings, we value the informed contribution of our members on issues they feel meet the organisation’s principles.

The DSA recognises that while we may have shared values, there may be differences in opinions and solutions on these issues, grounded in research and evidence. Members are welcome to bring these different views to the DSA via one or more of the following engagement mechanisms that they feel most appropriate.

Contribute with blogs

All DSA members can submit an insight/blog at any time. These can be multi-author submissions. Study groups will receive regular reminders, and blog guidelines will be hosted on the DSA website. We will also promote calls on social media and in our newsletter.

As a learned society advancing understanding and knowledge, the guiding principle is that blogs must be grounded in research and evidence, not opinion pieces. For this reason, the corresponding author will submit a short abstract to the [communications officer](#) with the proposed topic, as well as key points / findings and recommendations. Blogs will be reviewed by the Communications working group to check they cover an issue relevant to the DSA and that they are adequately referenced / sourced. The Comms Working Group may request external review expertise. Blogs will undergo a review process as detailed in the blog guidelines.

Blogs may be lightly edited by the communications officer, only for style and online accessibility, before publishing and promoting on the DSA website and all blogs will carry a disclaimer statement: "This article gives the views of the author/academic featured and does not necessarily represent the views of the Development Studies Association as a whole".

Organise discussions within relevant [study groups](#).

The DSA encourages members to join [existing study groups](#) which have experience organising activities, events, discussions, special issues of journals, and more within the structure of the DSA. These groups draw on available support opportunities such as mailing lists, website access, funding, conference panels, communications advice. If members do not feel a suitable study group exists, there is scope for new groups to be proposed. Guidelines on how to do this [can be found at the bottom of this webpage](#). Thematic activity may also take place within the DSA's Student / ECR group or with a joint EADI working group.

Propose a DSA webinar

If an individual member or a study group feels that a topic merits wider discussion beyond a study group; has interest within the wider development studies community; and falls within the remit of the DSA's mandate, a webinar can be proposed. We regret that we only have the capacity to support one webinar every six months. All webinars require at least one "sponsor" on Council to help drive the necessary actions and at least three months lead in time. It's advised to have a concept note for the intended webinar with the communications officer and a Council sponsor ahead of a Council meeting. There are [guidelines on what makes a good webinar](#) and a [list of tasks and timings](#) to give those proposing a sense of the commitment involved.

Propose a panel at conference

We welcome the convening of panels at the DSA conference on topics that need to be deeply explored. Panels supported by a DSA study group may benefit from their experience in having panels accepted. If convenors do not have experience in submitting a successful panel proposal, we invite you to contact a member of the Conference team, the Council, or a senior colleague for advice on submission. Panels do not need to follow a specific format. Success panels have involved a cross-section of development studies communities including civil society representatives, activists, academics and practitioners and taken forms including roundtables, question and answer sessions, and film viewings and discussions; we encourage the use of creative methods of communication.

Propose an agenda item at a Council meeting

The DSA Council represents elected members of the DSA who are Trustees of the charity. The Council meets three times a year, including one in-person meeting at the annual conference ahead of the AGM. If members have a specific agenda item that they would like to discuss, please document a short description of the agenda item including relevant context, and action requested of the DSA and send it to the DSA's [membership administrator](#) who will table this item at the next Council meeting. Urgent requests to review a proposal or action (for example the writing of a letter to support academic freedom and/or freedom of expression) can be sent to the President but must include full context (links to research and sources as relevant), suggested actions, and any resources that can be offered to inform or deliver on actions requested. These urgent requests can be discussed by the Council via email.