In order to discover how useful and informative our readers find the information and analysis that we publish every other month in *The OECD Observer*, and to find out what you think of the lay-out of the magazine, we sent out a questionnaire with issue No. 202, October/November 1996, to 11,300 subscribers. We received responses from 540 of you, or 4.8% (a rate of 1–2% is generally considered satisfactory for such surveys). On the assumption that you are representative of the readership as a whole, analysis of the responses received yields a good deal of valuable information.

**Reader Profile**
Readers of *The OECD Observer*
- are highly qualified (university professors and other educators, researchers, directors, journalists, engineers, consultants, documentalists, NGO representatives, civil servants...)
- span a wide variety of disciplines (economics, law, science, the humanities, etc.)
- work in education and research (288), economics and finance (176), the press (104), civil service (59), politics (49), industry (44) and social affairs (25) (multiple responses were possible).

**Reading Habits and Usefulness**
- Almost three-quarters of the readers (72%) ‘skim every article and read some of them’, 12% read fewer than half, and 10% read ‘about half’.
- 26% of readers find the information in the *Observer* ‘very useful’ in their work, 32% ‘intermittently useful’ and 41% ‘useful as background’ (Figure 1).
- The articles have a long shelf-life: over three-quarters (77%) of readers file the *Observer* for reference after reading it, and a little under a quarter (23%) pass it to a colleague or friend.
- Each issue of the *Observer* is read by 5.3 people (the usual multiplier for a magazine like the *Observer* being 4 – Figure 2).
- Over two-thirds (69%) of readers later buy the publications whose analysis they first read in articles in the *Observer* (Figure 3).

**Sales Channels and Frequency**
- Only a small proportion of readers (17%) are interested in buying the magazine from newsagents, and even fewer (9%) in reading it exclusively on the Internet (since December 1996, the *Observer* has been put on the Internet two months after its release).
- Three-quarters (76%) of readers think the *Observer* should remain bimonthly.
just under a quarter (23%) would like to see it become a monthly (Figure 4).

Content and Style
• 412 out of 540 readers think that articles are about the right length, 151 that they are easy to read, 32 that they are ‘too academic’, 18 that they are ‘too jargon-filled’, and 12 that they are ‘too complex’ (several would like to see stronger positions taken).
• A large majority of readers find that the mix of subject matter is satisfactory, the preferred topics being: globalisation, the environment, economics, emerging economies and economies in transition, employment, social policy, development, technology, trade, business, education and science.
• Several readers wrote ‘Don’t touch the balance’; others specifically mentioned articles on demographics, migration, health care, tourism, the ethics of multinational firms, the impact of globalisation on the South, and methodology.

Format and Design
• 93 and 95% of readers find, respectively, the format and number of pages satisfactory.
• 90% describe the layout as ‘easy on the eye’, 10% find it ‘dense’ (Figure 5). (In response to comments that boxes were difficult to read, we began using a different typeface for them in issue No. 204.)
• Our readers are avid consumers of charts and tables: over half (56%) consider that the (already large) number of them is satisfactory, while virtually all of the others (41%) want more (Figure 6).
• 53% of readers describe the photographs as ‘about right’, 28% as ‘well-chosen’ and 19% as ‘irrelevant’.
• Only two readers out of 540 wanted to see a full-colour Observer.

Conclusion
The main message to emerge clearly from the survey is that readers are pleased with the choice and variety of topics, as well as with the format of the Observer. The frequently recurring comment (expressed in a variety of ways) that the mix of subject matter should be left alone is significant.

Individual responses and comments suggesting changes do not, by definition, all point in the same direction, and it is not easy to analyse them.

Even so, the criticism/suggestions/praise outline a number of strong points and avenues for bringing the Observer even more closely in tune with its times, and with its present and future readership.
• A clearer expression of the OECD’s opinions and those of the authors would allow the style to be more direct and more lively.
• The selection of topics, while heeding the request that the balance of subjects be maintained, could oblige those readers who would like more articles on particular themes.
• Maintaining the quality of the readership and the reference value of articles.
• The publication of more charts and tables, without making the layout too dense.

We should like to extend our most heartfelt thanks to the readers who responded to our survey – for us, the direct contact established in this manner is essential. That is why, in the future, we shall be inviting you again to let us have your views on The OECD Observer.

Ulla Ranhall-Reyners
Editor