

What do readers really think of *The Psychologist?*

You can make money
helping us find out!

We would like a Society member to help us to carry out some properly designed research into readers' views. Tell us how you would use our database to select a truly representative sample, how you would approach them and what you would ask. Then we will tell you how much we would pay you to conduct that research, and work with you to flesh out your proposal.

E-mail the editor on jonsut@bps.org.uk.

Deadline:

WEDNESDAY 1 JUNE 2005



Jon Sutton

Contact Jon Sutton at the Society's Leicester office, or e-mail: jonsut@bps.org.uk.

I've been editor of *The Psychologist* for five years now, and I've failed: I still have little idea of what you think of *The Psychologist* and what you want from it. It's high time I found out. We're hoping to commission some research to get answers: see opposite for an invitation to tender your proposal. In the meantime, I'd like to use this one-off column to seek your views and announce some changes.

What I want is a magazine (that's right, not a journal!) that serves as a forum for psychologists of all descriptions to announce, discuss and debate what is new and exciting in the discipline. There should be room for articles of all types to address the fact that you're a diverse bunch with wide-ranging tastes. For example, we've been ticked off for an overemphasis on the trivial (see Letters, February). But at the same time I think the biggest response we've had to an article in my five years was for the recent 'Eye on fiction' piece (see February), which, while an excellent article in my view, was hardly essential CPD.

A similar comment I received recently was that the more 'serious-minded psychologists' were starting to mutter about the move to a more journalistic magazine style, and that we risked losing these readers. My message for those who don't think the tone, scope or standard of *The Psychologist* is up to it is 'if you can do better, let's see it'. Personally I'd love to see more serious academic debate and 'hard' science in *The Psychologist*, but we can't possibly know and get hold of everything that is out there. Get writing – there are plenty of benefits, even for the big names (see www.thepsychologist.org.uk). Yes, articles need to be written in a way that engages the interest of the non-specialist, but there is no reason why that has to compromise quality.

With my 'vision' in mind, this month sees some changes aimed at making us more of a 'forum for discussion and debate'. Pretty much everything is up for debate in psychology, and I'd like to see that reflected more in *The Psychologist*: less 'you shouldn't have published that', more 'here's why I disagree'. To this end we've started asking authors to add an 'Issues for discussion' box to their articles to encourage debate through the letters page, and we've made some changes to the website. Hopefully by now (you can never tell when technology is involved) members can go to www.thepsychologist.org.uk and comment on articles in the current issue. Your comments will come to me and, as long as it's all legal, will be posted on the site's new forum and possibly lifted for the print version. You should also be able to use a forum on the site to seek information/help/work

experience from the psychological community, and to ask any serious, weird or wonderful question that's been bugging you. I'd also like to draw your attention to the 'Question time' section of the Letters page... it's never really taken off, but the success of similar (although clearly not plagiarised...) formats in *The Guardian* and *New Scientist* convince me that it could grow into a popular part of the publication.

Our other main change this month is to the news section. In January Dr Christian Jarrett joined the team of three on *The Psychologist* as our first journalist, adding this role to his half-time post as editor of the Society's Research Digest. The free Digest service (a *Psychologist* initiative) has been a huge success, gathering 11,000 subscribers in its first year with very little promotion (if you haven't signed up, go to www.researchdigest.org.uk). This is largely down to Christian's ability to wade through stacks of journals and summarise the important bits for a wide audience, and we're sure these skills will be put to good effect in our expanded news. Although 'Research in brief' is being incorporated into this section, this isn't the end for it. We welcome your contributions just as much as ever.

What does the future hold? As our audience has grown and we've been read more widely, we've received more advertising and articles. We've started producing bigger issues to accommodate all this, but there's a limit to what a small team and budget can do, so pressure on space is at an all-time high, and the average delay between acceptance of an article and publication is much longer than I'd like. Perhaps the Psychologist Policy Committee will eventually discuss abandoning peer review in *The Psychologist* to shave a few months off the overall process: all articles are based on published research in any case, so it could be argued that review is not needed as it is in a journal. At the very least I know I need to make changes to the review and editing procedures to ensure we're as topical as possible.

One other possibility is web-only material, and in the next few years I hope to make more use of the website. There's a great publicly accessible archive of past issues up there, but until now it's basically been the print version online so there's been little reason to visit. Please go and use the discussion facilities: the more visitors we get, the more point there will be considering making more use of it. Any ideas to me please.

In fact, send me your comments about anything. What do you love/hate, who or what would you like to see covered, etc? It's still your publication, and it can't work without your contributions.

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