

Inside Story

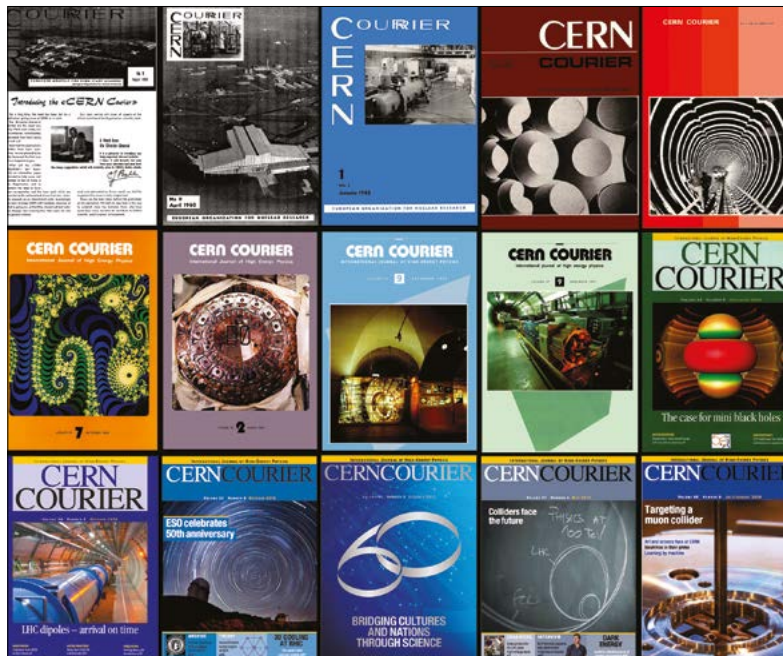
On the Courier's new future

"I think the *Courier* is excellent; it's sort of 'frozen in time', but in a rather appropriate and appealing way." Of all the lively comments received from the 1400 or so readers who took part in our recent survey (see page opposite), this one sums things up for the *CERN Courier*. "Excellent" might be a stretch for some, but, coming up for its 60th anniversary, this well-regarded periodical is certainly unique. It has been alongside high-energy physics as the field has grown up, from the rise of the Standard Model to the strengthening links with cosmology and astrophysics, the increasing scale and complexity of accelerators, detectors and computing, the move to international collaborations involving thousands of people, and other seismic shifts.

In terms of presentation, though, the *Courier* is indeed ripe for change. The website cerncourier.com was created in 1998 when the magazine's production and commercial dimensions were outsourced to IOP Publishing in the UK. Updated only 10 times per year with the publication of each print issue, the website has had a couple of makeovers (one in 2007 and one earlier this year) but its functionality remains essentially unchanged for 20 years.

A semi-static, print-led website is no longer best suited to today's publishing scene. The sheer flexibility of online publishing allows more efficient ways to communicate different stories to new audiences. Our survey concurs: a majority of readers (63%) indicated that they were willing to receive fewer print copies per year if cerncourier.com was updated more regularly – a view held most strongly among younger responders. It is this change to its online presence that drives the new publishing model of *CERN Courier* from 2019, with a new, dynamic website planned to launch in the spring.

At the same time, there is high value attached to a well-produced print magazine that worldwide readers can receive free of charge. And, as the results of our survey show, a large section of the community reads the *Courier* only when they pick up a copy in their labs or universities to browse over lunch or while travelling. That's why the print magazine is staying, though at a reduced frequency of six rather than 10 issues per year. To reflect this change, the magazine



The *Courier* strives to be as enjoyable as it is authoritative.

will have a new look from next year. Among many improvements, we have adopted a more readable font, a clearer layout and other modern design features. There are new and revised sections covering careers, opinion and reviews, while the feature articles – the most popular according to our survey – will remain as the backbone of the issue.

It is sometimes said that the *Courier* can be a bit too formal, a little dry. Yet our survey did not reveal a huge demand to lighten things up – so don't expect to see Sudoku puzzles or photos of your favourite pet any time soon. That said, the *Courier* is a magazine, not an academic journal; in chronicling progress in global high-energy physics it strives to be as enjoyable as it is authoritative.

Another occasional criticism is that the *Courier* is a mere mouthpiece for CERN. If it is, then it is also – and unashamedly – a mouthpiece for other labs and for the field as a whole. Within just a few issues of its publication, the *Courier* outgrew its original editorial remit and expanded to cover activities at related laboratories worldwide (with the editorially distinct *CERN Bulletin* serving the internal CERN community). The new-look *Courier* will also retain an important sentence on its masthead demarcating the views stated in the magazine from those of CERN management.

A network of around 30 laboratory correspondents helps to keep the magazine updated with news from their facilities on an informal basis. But the more members of the global high-energy physics community who interact, the better the *Courier* can serve them. Whether it's a new result, experiment, machine or theorem, an event, appointment or prize, an opinion, review or brazen self-promotion, get in touch at cern.courier@cern.ch.

● Matthew Chalmers, editor.

Reader survey: the results are in

To shape the *Courier's* new life in print and online, a survey was launched this summer in conjunction with IOP Publishing to find out what readers think of the magazine and website, and what changes could be made. The online survey asked 21 questions and responders were routed to different sections of the survey depending on the answers they provided. Following promotion on cerncourier.com, CERN's website, *CERN Bulletin*, social media channels and e-mails to CERN users, there were a total of 1417 responses.

Responders were split roughly 3:1 male to female, with a fairly even age distribution. Geographically, they were based predominantly in France, the US, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. Some 43% of the respondents work at a university, followed by a national or international research institute (34%), with the rest working in teaching (5%) and various industries. While three-quarters of the respondents named experimental particle physics as their main domain of work, many have other professional interests ranging from astronomy to marketing.

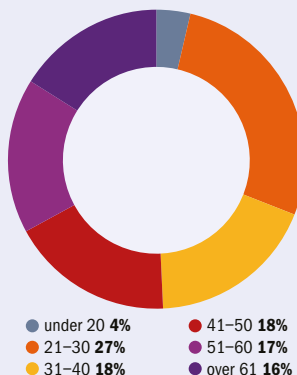
Responders were evenly split between those that read the printed magazine and those that don't. Readers tend to read the magazine on a regular basis and, overall, have been reading for a significant period of time. A majority (54.1%) do not read the magazine via a direct subscription, and the data suggest that one copy of the *Courier* is typically read by more than one person.

In terms of improving the *CERN Courier* website, there was demand for a mobile-optimised platform and for video content, though a number of respondents were unaware that the website even existed. Importantly for the future of *CERN Courier*, a majority of readers (63%) indicated that they were willing to receive fewer print copies per year if cerncourier.com was updated more regularly; this trend was sharpest in the under-30 age group.

When it comes to the technical level of the articles, which is a topic of much consideration at the *Courier*, the responses indicate that the level is pitched just right (though, clearly, a number of readers will find some topics tougher than others given the range of subfields within high-energy physics). Readers also felt that their fields were well represented, and agreed that more articles about careers and people would be of interest.

Many written comments were provided, a few of which are listed here: "More investigative articles please"; "I would like that it has a little

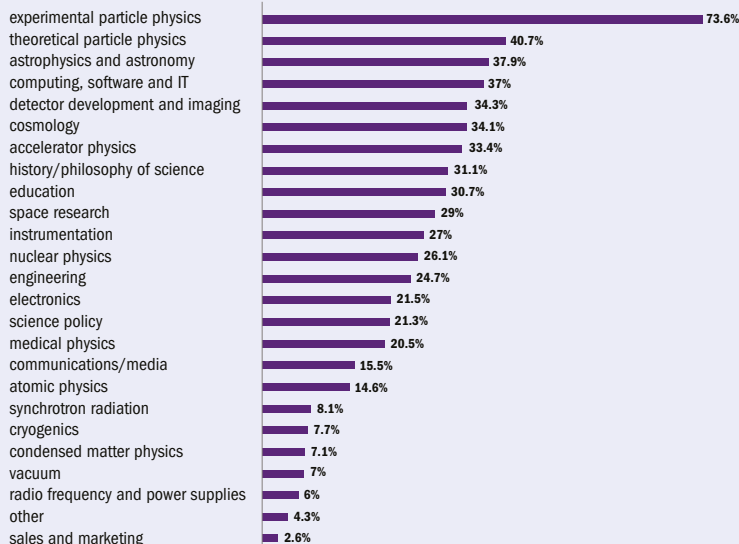
Age of survey responders



What is your professional position?



What are your professional interests?



glossary"; "A column about people themselves, not only the physics they do"; "More debate on topics on which there is discussion in the field"; "Please do NOT modify *CERN Courier* into a 'posher' version"; "Leave out group photos of people at big meetings"; and "Make a *CERN Courier* kids edition". The overwhelming majority of comments were positive, and the few that weren't stood out: "The whole magazine reads like propaganda for CERN and for the Standard Model"; "The *Courier* style is intentionally

humourless, frigid, stale and boring. Accordingly, almost everybody agrees that the obituaries are by far its best part"; and, curiously, "The actual format is so boring that I stop to read it!"

It only remains to thank participants of the survey and to congratulate the winners of our random prize draw (V Boudry, J Baeza, S Clawson, V Lardans and M Calvetti), who each receive a branded CERN hoodie.

● Matthew Chalmers, CERN, and Laura Gillham, IOP Publishing.