

# **Channels of Influence: The Interaction between Canada and the OECD<sup>1</sup>**

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## Abstract

After many years of neglect, the OECD has attracted significant scholarly attention in the past decade (P. Alasuutari & A. Rasimus, 2009; Armingeon & Beyeler, 2004; Carroll & Kellow, 2011; Grinvalds, 2008; Mahon & McBride, 2008; Marcussen, 2004; Ougaard, 2010; Pal, 2008, 2012; Woodward, 2009). Despite this new work, however, relatively little is known about how member states of the OECD interact with the institution, how they exercise influence, and how the OECD influences them.

The larger issue addressed in the paper is the role of international governmental organizations in the policy transfer of public management ideas. Obviously, there is a global conversation about public management practices, a conversation that started in earnest with debates about New Public Management, but it continues apace with calls for reform in the face of the financial crisis. We know that public management ideas do not exist in a domestic vacuum, and we know anecdotally that domestic governments are constantly being scolded about their management systems and “best practices.” There is even a literature on policy transfer that tries to conceptualize this dynamic (D. Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; D. P. Dolowitz, 2009; D. P. Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; McCourt & Minogue, 2001), but in-depth case studies remain rare.

To our knowledge, this will be the first time that such a detailed analysis of one member state’s relations with the OECD has ever been done. Canada was a founding member of the OECD, and as a “middle power” has been both influential in the organization (Donald Johnston, a former Canadian cabinet minister, was Secretary-General from 1996 to 2006) and an energetic participant in its various bodies.

This paper builds on Pal’s earlier work (Pal, 2012), as well as work conducted by Pal and Clark in building the Atlas of Public Policy and Management.<sup>3</sup> In this phase of the project, we report on an electronic survey and in-person, recorded interviews with 28 senior officials in Canadian federal governments who are responsible for liaising with the OECD. The Permanent Canadian Delegation to the OECD helped develop a list of these officials, and the project has the support of the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada as well as the Privy Council Office.

The recorded interviews yielded over 1,000 transcript pages, which will eventually be subject to an NVivo analysis. At this early stage, the paper takes a selection of key questions and responses and traces patterns and observations on the policy impact of the interactions. Some preliminary conclusions from the survey and interviews are:

- Canadian participation in OECD bodies is widely dispersed, i.e., not concentrated in one or two policy areas.
- There is a substantial commitment of resources and time to engaging with the OECD.

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://portal.publicpolicy.utoronto.ca/en/Pages/index.aspx>

- Canadian departments seem to be engaging directly with their OECD counterparts, unmediated either by DFATD or the Permanent Delegation.
- Only a minority of departments has formal coordinating mechanisms or structures to deal with OECD issues. Most of them have no formal structure at all to share information within the department, and some have mixed systems of committees and networks. The clear preference is to share and coordinate information and positions through loose, standing networks or ad hoc networks that form around issues as they arise.
- There is strong evidence of “indirect influence” of the OECD on policy development in Canada. At the same time, through vigorous participation, OECD standards are themselves shaped by Canadian officials.
- OECD policy standards are often used domestically as justifications for domestic policy initiatives that would otherwise be controversial.
- The OECD still has a substantial reservoir of credibility, both for the overall objectivity of its analysis and its quality.

## 1. International Organizations

Ideas and practices of public management do not exist in domestic vacuums – they are debated in what is now an on-going global conversation about public sector reform, are recommended as “best practices,” and are often forced upon recalcitrant governments as conditions for financial and other help. The global spread of New Public Management (NPM) has created a mini-academic industry of commentary and analysis, but no one disputes that NPM ideas spread (in different ways and in different intensities) around the world (Aucoin, 1995; Barzelay, 2001; Bouckaert, 2006; Christensen & Laegreid, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2011; Dunleavy, 2006; Kettl, 2005; Lane, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Others have noted the international migration of public management ideas, whether NPM or not (Caiden, 1991; McCourt & Minogue, 2001; Pal, 2012; Stone, 2004). As well, “policy learning” and “policy transfer” have emerged as important fields of inquiry in understanding domestic policy developments (D. Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; D. P. Dolowitz, 2009; D. P. Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Evans, 2004a, 2004b, 2009a, 2009b; Rose, 1993).

How do ideas and models about public policy and public management spread? This is really a question about the “effectors” (distributors) and “receptors” (receivers) of ideas. Put this way, of course, the variety of effectors is almost infinite, though the receptors of interest in this paper are governments. Effectors may be individuals (academics or consultants), NGOs, think tanks, media, conferences, etc. But one of the most important is international governmental organizations (IGOs), the World Bank, the UN, the IMF and, on a lesser plane, the OECD, prominent among them. They have all of the key ingredients to be efficient and persuasive effectors of ideas: financial resources,

research capacity, credibility (more or less), and in some cases, the leverage that comes with lending money (e.g., World Bank, IMF) and the conditions that can be imposed as a consequence. Moreover, many IGOs are member-based organizations, and so have the additional clout of the leading countries in the international community. The OECD, for example, is often described (or dismissed) as the “rich countries club.” This is partly derisive, but it also refers to those countries that have, by and large, been economically and politically successful, and therefore worthy of emulation. In particular, there is wide acknowledgement of the OECD’s important role in spreading public management ideas around the world (Armingeon & Beyeler, 2004; Huerta Melchor, 2006; Kettl, 2006; Peters, 1997; Pollitt, 2006; Premfors, 2006; Sahlin-Anderrson, 2001; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996, 2000).

While the role of IGOs would appear to be obvious in a globalized world, the academic literature has taken some time to acknowledge that fact. In the policy field, most of the discipline has traditionally been focused on national policy developments, and so “policy transfer” from international sources is a relatively new development. In the international relations field, the dominance of realism encouraged a focus on states, power, and interests. Even when the role and impact of IGOs was acknowledged in this tradition, it was because they were simply ciphers for powerful states. An alternative view began to emerge in the late 1990s that IGOs were not mere ciphers, and that in fact they could and did act autonomously from their members. As such, they had to be taken seriously.

An early and pioneering analysis of the autonomy of IGOs noted that “while it is true that the social policy of official international organizations is shaped in part by the policies of the most powerful state actors underpinning them, nonetheless the IGOs themselves and particularly their human resource specialists have a degree of autonomy within this framework which has increasingly been used to fashion an implicit global political dialogue with international NGOs about the social policies of the future that go beyond the political thinking or political capacity of the underpinning states” (Deacon, Hulse, & Stubbs, 1997: 61).

Another early analysis of IGOs as autonomous was Risse-Kapen:

“Transgovernmental networks among state officials in sub-units of national governments, international organizations, and regimes frequently pursue their own agenda, independently from and sometimes even contrary to the declared policies of their national governments” (Risse-Kappen, 1995: 4). More recent work by Barnett and Finnemore has continued to emphasize this theme. They point out that most international relations theory assumes that these organizations (and they claimed that there were some 238 of them) behave only as states wish them to behave. But they point out that international organizations are also bureaucracies with specialized expertise: “IGOs are often authoritative because of their expertise. ...Specialized knowledge derived from training or experience persuades us to confer on experts, and the bureaucracies that house them, the authority to make judgements and solve problems” (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004: 24). That authority then becomes the basis for autonomous action.

Having established rules and norms, IGOs are eager to spread the benefits of their expertise and often act as conveyor belts for the transmission of norms and models of good political behavior. There is nothing accidental or unintended about this role. Officials in IGOs often insist that part of their mission is to spread, inculcate, and enforce global values and norms. They are the missionaries of our time. Armed with a notion of progress, an idea of how to create a better life, and some understanding of the conversion process, many IGO staff have as their stated purpose to shape state action by establishing best practices and by articulating and transmitting norms that define what constitutes acceptable and legitimate state behavior. (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004: 33)

Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson, and Veggeland (2010) analyze the European Union, the OECD, and the WTO as “compound bureaucracies” that blend what they call “departmental, epistemic and supranational decision-making dynamics.” A key question they pose is the balance between the organizational autonomy of international organizations and what they call “intergovernmentalism,” or the direct influence of member states over decision-making in these organizations. They conclude that organizational autonomy typically trumps state influence: “Occasionally some signs of intergovernmentalism can be noticed but mainly at the organisational helm of international bureaucracies – among the top leaders. Intergovernmentalism at the top level rarely filters down to the lower levels of international bureaucracies – among desk officials” (Trondal et al., 2010: 197). This highlights the same point made by Barnett and

Finnemore about the insulating influence of expertise. Once organizations become large enough, and once their work becomes sufficiently specialized, they automatically gain autonomy vis-à-vis state members, and moreover, this autonomy is actively sought and established behind the fig leaf of members' direction. "Rather than replicating intergovernmental cleavages, international bureaucracies seem to get a life of their own, undisturbed by struggles in the politicised sphere of international policy making. International civil servants have been given an opportunity to act in isolation from the narrow interests of individual member states, and they seem to exploit that opportunity to the fullest..." (Trondal et al., 2010: 198). A similar argument about the (benign) importance of international secretariats is made by Mathiason (2007). Others have excoriated these secretariats for mismanagement based on their blinkered economic views or internal, bureaucratic self-interest (Berkman, 2008; Easterly, 2006).

However, there is no real consensus on the balance between state control and bureaucratic autonomy in IGOs, even in the voluminous work on the IMF and the World Bank. Some still hold to the view, for example, that the IMF is simply an instrument of rich countries (Carin & Wood, 2005). Others maintain that there is a mix of both factors. In his study of the two institutions, Clegg (2013) argues that member states (which he calls "shareholders") tend to predominate, but that in some cases, groups representing individuals on the ground ("stakeholders") – have influence as well. Nonetheless, "...in both institutions a group of key creditor states have by virtue of their command over financial resources come to occupy strategically important positions" (Clegg, 2013: 157). In their analysis of the World Bank, Yi-Chong and Weller go further and conclude that an

IGO this large has a multitude of state and bureaucratic actors simultaneously engaged in complex decision-making process: "Such an institution is beyond the limited world in which states delegate and control and IGOs seek to develop arenas for independent action. Nor can the approach of interpreting the Bank solely as a bureaucracy with a mission to defend and self-interest to drive. ...The Bank has never been a single bureaucracy with a united vision" (Yi-Chong & Weller, 2009: 234). Finally, some analysts claim that neither member states nor autonomous bureaucracies are driving IGOs; outside interests, usually financial, actually set their agendas (Gould, 2006; Peet, 2003).

These debates in the general IGO literature are reflected in assessments of the OECD and the influence of its member states versus its secretariat, though with a small twist. With their location in Washington, and with the dominant financial contribution of the US, it is tempting to argue that the IMF and the World Bank are both "controlled" by the American government. That argument is less easy to make in the OECD case. It is based in Paris, the financial dominance of the US is arguably less (though it remains the largest funder), and decisions in the OECD Council are based on consensus. Nonetheless, "neo-liberalism," as a stalking horse for the US, is often highlighted as a dominant ideology in the OECD. Jackson, for example, argues that while the OECD is ostensibly overseen by its members, in fact it is "basically run by and for economic policy officials, and has a particularly close working relationship to ministries of finance and central banks of member countries" (Jackson, 2008: 172).

Jakobi and Martens (2010) acknowledge a mix of member influence and autonomous IGO dynamics in the case of the OECD. They note that in the tax field, the US and the EU are particularly prominent, and that the first impetus for much of the OECD's work comes from member states. The US, as the main OECD funder and with an interest in a neo-liberal regimes, has been especially influential in economic policy advice. On the other hand, they also give weight to "internal dynamics" in the OECD, such as disciplinary knowledge (e.g., economists vs. lawyers vs. educational specialists), and the source of ideas within OECD directorates.

In short, the question of members' roles in, and relationships with, the OECD (and by extension, other IGOs) is still unclear. Somewhat remarkably, almost all the information about this question is either anecdotal, or based on single cases studies, such as tax harmonization. Our approach in this paper is different. We focus on a single country – Canada – in depth. This is a reasonable choice for the OECD, since Canada was a founding member of the organization in 1961, has had a former cabinet minister (Donald Johnson) as Secretary-General, and is active but not "dominant." Our approach to understanding its role in the OECD is to interview senior officials, both in Canada and the OECD itself, on the nature of the interaction. This paper reports on some of the results of the Canadian interviews.

## **2. Methodology**

The research was conducted in two complementary phases between November 2013 and March 2014. In the first phase, an electronic, largely forced-choice questionnaire

was distributed with 30 responses (see Appendix A). The focus was frequency and types of interaction between federal government “contact officials” and the OECD. The second phase was a follow-up in-person with each respondent with open-ended questions, primarily about the internal management dimensions and effects of OECD interactions (see Appendix B). These interviews were recorded and transcribed. They were administered on a confidential, non-attributable basis, and the gathering, disposition and use of the data are governed by SSHRC’s ethical guidelines as administered by Carleton University. Exhibit A lists the twelve federal government departments<sup>4</sup> that participated in the survey as of March 1, 2014 (we will interview five more). There were 28 in-person interviews in total (some departments had more than one interview).

The overall sample size for both interviews is small. However, we are confident that we have contacted all relevant personnel in the government of Canada having any significant responsibility for contact with the OECD. In compiling the list, we were initially advised by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), which has a working group within the department to coordinate its Canada-OECD contacts. TBS and Health Canada also kindly helped us pilot the survey instrument. Subsequently we contacted the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), which is responsible for coordinating across-government liaison with the OECD, and in conjunction with support from the Permanent Delegation of Canada to the OECD, it helped further in making contacts with other departments. With each contact, we asked for advice for other

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<sup>4</sup> We plan eventually to conduct interviews with provincial officials as well, possibly from Ontario and Quebec.

contacts in other departments. Without exception, the support we received was thorough, timely, professional and helpful.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Federal Government Departments**  
**and Agencies Surveyed (as of March 1, 2014)**

Agriculture and Agri-food Canada
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
Competition Bureau
Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development
Environment Canada
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Health Canada
Industry Canada
Privy Council Office
Statistics Canada
Transport Canada
Treasury Board Secretariat

**3. Findings**

**3.1 Survey**

The survey principally asked questions about the nature of the interaction with the OECD from the government of Canada side. Two questions (Q8 and Q9) asked about the target of that interaction – OECD committees, working groups or other bodies. As an international organization, the OECD’s work is organized in distinctive ways (Pal, 2012; Woodward, 2004). On the Secretariat side, there are 13 core functional policy directorates, as well as a number of other bodies such as International Energy Agency (OECD, n.d.). Each of the policy directorates supports at least one “main committee,” and most of those committees have specialized, subsidiary bodies such as “working groups,” “expert

groups,” or “networks.” The directorates consist of OECD staff members; the committees and their bodies consist of representatives of member states and observers. The organizational geometry is fluid and variable – committees, for example, have the discretion to establish their own subsidiary bodies and their terms of reference.

There are no comparative data on how countries decide to allocate resources to participating in the OECD, apart from establishing Permanent Delegations if they are members. In the Canadian case, at least, participation and interaction with the OECD is up to the discretion of departments, who appoint (and pay for) delegates on committees and other bodies. Committees rarely meet more than once or twice a year, and the same is usually true of subsidiary bodies. Communication among committee members of course may take place year-round. Even membership on a committee is no signal of deep engagement, though chairmanship of a committee signals both the individual official’s interest and commitment to the body, as well as the member state’s willingness to support that role.

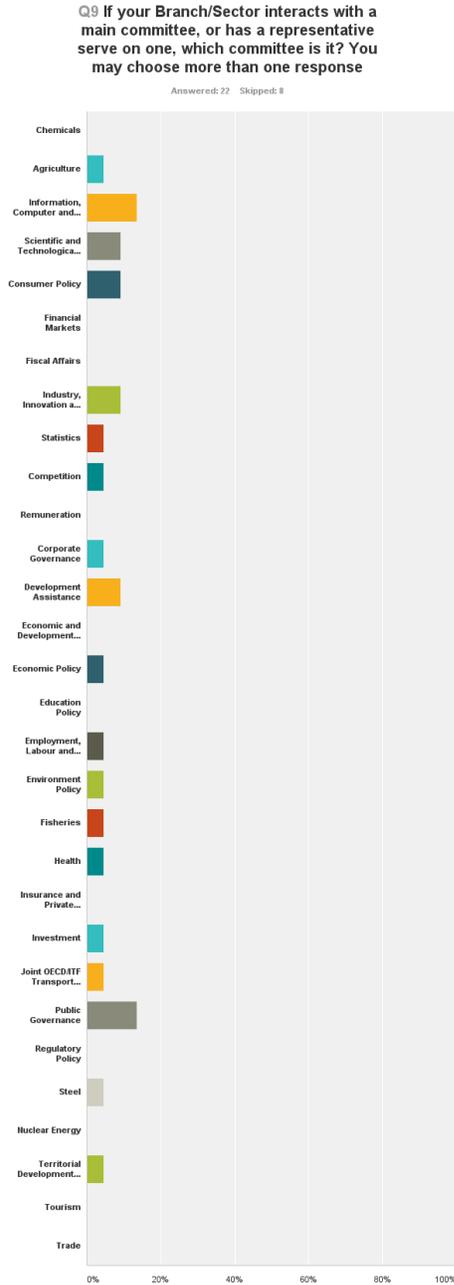
The answers to questions 8 and 9 show that respondents principally engage with main committees (63%) and working groups (78%).<sup>5</sup> As Exhibit 2 shows, the distribution across committees was relatively even, though with some gaps. What this means is unclear at this stage. The committees could be “weak” and so unattractive, e.g., Tourism, or the policy field is unimportant, e.g., in the Canadian case at the federal level, education, since this is a provincial jurisdiction. Alternatively, we have several key departments yet to

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<sup>5</sup> About 800 Canadian federal officials visit the OECD annually for meetings. Interview 001/21NOV13.

interview, and they may show activity across the other OECD bodies. Nonetheless, even with the gaps, Canadian participation is widely dispersed, i.e., not concentrated in one or two policy areas.

## Exhibit 2 Interaction with OECD Committees



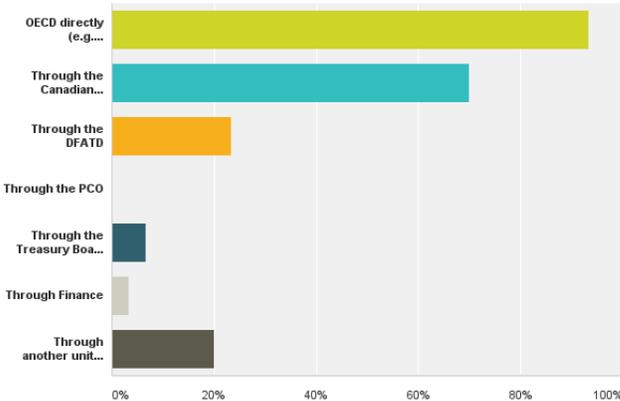
The leading committees are Information, Computer and Communications Policy (14%), Public Governance (13.64%), Scientific and Technological Policy (9%), Consumer Policy (9%), Industry, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Development Assistance (9%).

As we pointed out, the decision to participate is up to departments, but that still begs the question of how that participation is channeled. One model would have it channeled primarily through the foreign affairs department. The other model would have departments representing themselves at the OECD (though of course ultimately in the name of the government of Canada). It seems from Exhibit 3 that Canada comes closer to the second model, with DFATD and the Permanent Delegation serving largely coordinating roles. In practice, the two models are combined, with a thin shell of horizontal coordination containing a kaleidoscope of semi-formal networks.

**Exhibit 3**  
**Interaction with OECD Committees**

**Q11 What channels does your Branch/Sector normally use to interact with the OECD? You may choose more than one response.**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0

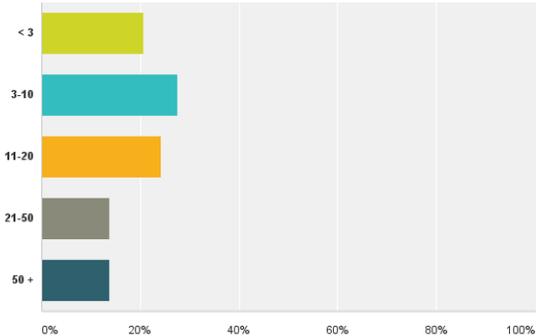


The tables listed in Exhibit 4 (responses to questions 12, 13, and 16) show a substantial commitment of resources and time to engaging with the OECD. The modal category of numbers of contacts per year is 11-20 (question 12); the modal category for FTE days per year devoted to working with the OECD is 21-50; the frequency of involvement across a variety of forms of contact is categorized as “often.”

**Exhibit 4**  
**Commitment of Resources and Time**  
**(Questions 12, 13, 16)**

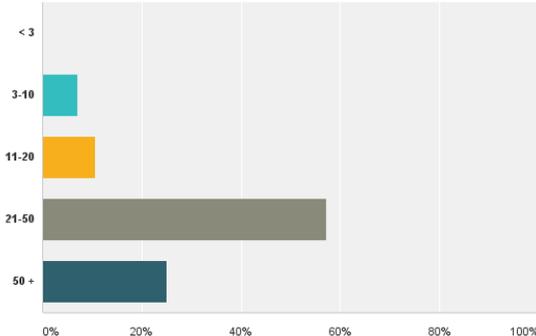
**Q12 How many times a year is your Branch/Sector in contact with the Paris-based Canadian delegation?**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 1



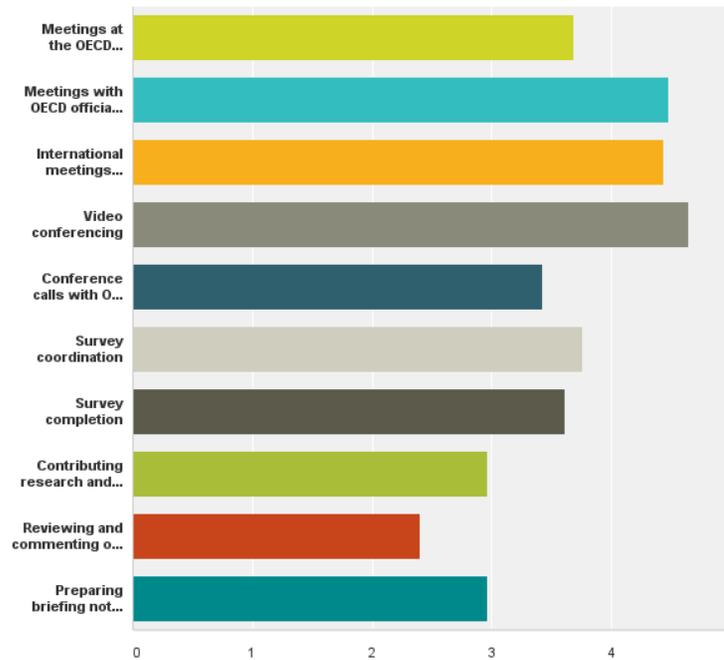
**Q13 On average, how many FTE days per year are devoted by your Branch/Sector to working with the OECD?**

Answered: 28 Skipped: 2



**Q16 Of your work with the OECD, how would you rank the frequency of your involvement in the following activities in 2012?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



The answers to these questions reinforce the point that Canadian departments seem to be engaging directly with their OECD counterparts, unmediated either by DFATD or the Permanent Delegation. DFATD has its own departmental agenda and own areas of policy responsibility, e.g. trade, investment and development assistance, obviously focusing on matters of high foreign policy. It establishes the broad direction of Canada's activities in the OECD as such, through instructions to the Permanent Representative. This includes taking positions on the OECD budget and external relations (e.g., accession negotiations). In terms of coordination, there is an agenda-setting exercise every two years where DFATD solicits information about priorities from departments. The Permanent

Delegation also helps with coordination in Paris. In principle, all government visitors (federal government, provinces, municipalities) go through the Permanent Delegation to receive passes, but in practice these can be arranged separately by the visitors themselves and their counterparts in the OECD, so it is an imperfect mechanism of coordination at best. Nonetheless, it serves several important functions. The Delegation can “fill in” at OECD meetings when departmental officials cannot attend. The coordination exercise does yield priorities and broad directions. This role and the interaction with departments will require more analysis.

The results for question 16 show that out of 30 respondents, 28 had actually attended meetings in Paris, and all had attended at least one OECD-sponsored meeting outside of Paris. On the other hand, very few had met with OECD officials in Ottawa. The nature of the work that they do seems to be concentrated in participating in OECD surveys (this is a key instrument for the OECD, gathering information about its members’ activities and any trends) and contributing to research reports and documents.

### **3.2 In-Person Interviews**

The electronic survey asked principally about the nature of the interaction by Canadian government officials with the OECD. The in-person interviews were gauged to probe two things: (1) coordination of OECD activities internally to the department, and externally with other departments and other levels of government, and (2) the relevance of the OECD for Canadian (departmental) policy making. Space does not permit a complete

analysis of all the responses to the 22 questions in the instrument. For the purposes of this paper, we will review responses to one question in each of these categories.

**3.3 Question 1: Does your Department have systems and/or structures in place to support the sharing of information about interactions with the OECD across the Department?**

**Exhibit 5: Categorization of Responses to Question 1**

N = 24

Formal Structure			Coordinative Mechanisms			
Yes	No	Mixed	Wiki	Loose Network	Ad Hoc Network	Committee
9	10	6	1	9	7	7

Note: Totals are greater than 24 because of double entries in some cases.

Only a minority of departments has formal coordinating mechanisms or structures to deal with OECD issues. Most of them have no formal structure at all to share information within the department, and some have mixed systems of committees and networks. The clear preference is to share and coordinate information and positions through loose, standing networks or ad hoc networks that form around issues as they arise. Based on the interviews, it seems that there are several reasons for this. First, in some cases, the OECD policy connection is fairly minor or unimportant to the department as a whole, and is the responsibility of one or a small handful of officials. Second, the style of coordination will vary with departmental structures themselves – ones that are large and/or decentralized will rely more on networks than ones that have a more hierarchical command structure. Third, if the official is representing the department on a working

group or an expert committee, the scope of the work is so focused and narrow that it is of no great interest to others and so does not require much sharing. Fourth, to the degree that an OECD policy issue is horizontal, then there will be a greater need for cross-departmental coordination and information sharing. Finally – and we consider this to be a key factor – the reliance on networked coordinative mechanisms is itself a reflection of the OECD’s networked approach to policy issues. As mentioned above, the OECD has a variable and confusing geometry, with policy issues successively sliced into smaller and smaller domains through committees to working groups to expert committees, and even further to ad hoc meetings and conferences. A member state, in dealing with this type of organization, is likely to develop an isomorphic response: if its interlocutor is variegated and networked, it will be too. Though we have data only for the Canadian case, we hypothesize that this pattern will be true of other member states, whatever their internal structures.

The following quotes (identified by code) from the responses to this question provide an insight into the mechanisms of networked coordination around OECD interactions.

But that’s fairly informal, at the working level, my analyst who helps prepare me for OECD meetings, will consult regularly with them in developing the material, same thing for the centers of government meeting that... We do a little bit of touching base with our foreign defense policy colleagues; because they’re our...you know they’re kind of our gateway into the Department of Foreign Affairs training development. ... And we’ll work through that when we need to, for example connecting to the embassy in Moscow, so that we can get a feeling for how they see things going on the ground, and whether or not any of the reforms that we’re hearing about are real... But it’s all fairly I would say informal, and then if there’s no kind of formal structure, it just relies on us connecting the dots and

then you know connecting to the right people and getting the information that we need. (005/091213)

So for example when we're going call through on the meeting in terms of priorities, our office would coordinate since there's no specific office that would be able to coordinate a whole sort of a [policy] portfolio response. And in order to help facilitate that, I've set up a network which is a very informal network of people who are interested in the work of the OECD. Some because they actually sit on a committee, others because they feed in input, and others just because they think it's a good thing to know more about. Really that's the only system that we have. (002/151113)

It really is case by case, because there is a lot of stuff that simply isn't relevant, and there's a lot of stuff and so sending people like huge load of materials doesn't help. The real interesting part is the surveys, because we get a lot of details on surveys, and so we have a division with one of our sectors who deals with those, and works very close with Department of Finance. (004/261113)

Its approach is on two things. So one is to relay out a broad strategy about what our objectives were and how the various people I just talked about are prosecuting their agendas at the OECD and ensuring that we're in sync. And then we also have periodically debriefs, so by with example [official] was in a big meeting ... and she will debrief other colleagues who might be interested in that including other departments, so PCO for instance in that case was debriefed as well. (009/181213)

Within our branch we clearly have [policy] decision committees that are put in place to help...that really help support the decisions that we make domestically for Canada in terms of [policy] regulation. We have our weekly meetings of these ... committees and reporting out on OECD activities; these are standing right among the agendas of those committees. So in that way, because we have activity in the OECD across our branch, it helps us to share what's going on so we always know what's going on. And that's not only with the OECD but it's with some of the other international bodies ... And then we have our executive committee meeting once a week, which is headed by our ADM. (010/201213)

So generally what happens if there's a request or something broad like the department's priorities to the OECD. If it's something particular to agendas of each of the different committees, it's up to the committee representative to contact other people in that department. So depending on the topics, the committee we deal with touches a broad range of topics ... so we will reach out to the relevant people within the department to seek their inputs and if there are holes into the initiatives then we try to touch base with the other committee representatives, just to make sure that we are on the same page. (016/280114)

But most of the time, the way we coordinate is project specific, an expert to expert type of dialogue to get the expertise in terms of what we should be doing, and then go from there and then develop the position. The thing about the work of the [agency] is it's very wide ranging and I don't imagine a group of 6 or even 10 people across the department that would be interested in all individual projects. ...so most of the time yeah, it's done one on one, or small groups of people and it's kind of a need basis – there is a meeting coming up or there is a report that came out we need to – we coordinate that way. (019/030214)

Sharing information, well we are a bit unique in the sense that we are the only part of [agency] that deals with regulation – so where the sharing actually occurs, this is more often between us and PCO and my department who are regulators. It's not that the [agency] isn't terribly interested, it's just that it's got nothing really to do with what they do there. (022/040214)

**3.4 Question 15: In your judgement, how relevant is the OECD for the development of departmental policy? By “relevance” I mean having a direct or indirect influence on policy.**

One obvious problem of response bias in this question is that it was asked of officials who are responsible for departmental interactions with the OECD. They are hardly likely to suggest that the OECD has no relevance to policy making. On the other hand, this was a confidential and anonymous interview, somewhat counterbalancing the potential bias.

**Exhibit 6: Categorization of Responses to Question 15**

**N = 21 (usable responses)**

Interviewee Code	Relevant				Comment
	Yes	No	Direct	Indirect	
022/040214	X			X	My role was actually to say, basically present findings and opportunities to my colleagues who are in charge of these ... sectors, say did you know what Australia is doing? There's differently did you know this serious report here, very interesting and by the way the experts used – the chair was this person.

001/151113	X			X	<p>I think its influential in the sense that you know if a country comes up with something that works in terms of, I don't know, [policy] for example its quite influential in that area because it provides a platform to say you know this is what we're doing with our [policy instrument]. Why don't you... wouldn't it be nice if everybody did and so we wouldn't be the only ones taking the heat from the ... companies.</p> <p>And... and there's you know ... policies are being... discussed and debated like [policies] I think they are considered to be fairly influential. Certainly the ... industry is all of a sudden really interested in me because I'm a member of the [OECD] ... committee in they're worried about a report that committee's working on right now.</p> <p>Another thing the OECD... I mean it's hard to connect the dots but the OECD's economic review of Canada and 2010 said [policy]... it was a pretty out there idea. OECD pushed it and now it has been, it's been more accepted and more taken on.</p>
002/151113	X		X		<p>Well the mandate of the department covers a lot of the different areas ... And I would say there are ways the OECD is directly relevant there, because the data and the evidence is really necessarily to be able to do comparisons, and so I mean we wouldn't have to do that if it really works very well with OECD.</p>
003/251113	X			X	<p>I mean there's the usual suspects, there is always US, Australia, UK, but the benefits of the meetings is sometimes you hear about something in particular – in Estonia or Slovenia, and then it's worth getting a little more information. But we wouldn't normally look there for developments.</p>

004/261113	X			X	Again I harken back to when I said that Canada we are involved in the [policy] country studies. That was very useful because we were dealing with a specific issue. And you know almost every country has the same issue with [policy]. That was very useful, in terms of broader budgeting and performance measurement. Some good governance things, some good governance principles, but not sure about the actual applicability across the board.
006/111213	X			X	Well, I mean I think the strength of the work of the OECD derives so much from its data its comparability of its data. The best practices, policy advice that it gives, the guidelines those types of things are the core value of the work of the OECD and I think, in general, like we've talked about with other departments and at the deputy minister level – I think Canada continues to get a lot of benefit from that very sort of solid, hands-on number crunching and that type of stuff.
007/121213	X			X	They're quite useful, it's just a fresh look at stuff. You know we kind of get wired in our ideas sometimes, and to have another view of how that works is interesting. You have to be a bit cautious about institutional differences. Like a comparison between say, us and France or the US is very difficult because their government is just so very different.
008/161213	X		X		Well, they are relevant and the example is really the work we've been doing on [policy], and we started doing it over a year and a half ago. Or even two years ago, when my colleague ... Australia was the co-chair of [OECD committee]. And we had a first meeting in Mexico over a year ago, or year

					<p>and a half ago, where we drafted some of these principles and then we came back and this year ... and they are going to the OECD's main governance committee.</p> <p>So the principles are completely aligned to our ... agenda ... And so, it will be a big endorsement of what we are doing internationally, which will be beneficial for public servants, but it will be beneficial for ministers and the government to know that what we are doing is being done in just about every other jurisdiction, endorsed by other jurisdictions.</p>
009/181213	X			X	<p>And I think, that, you know in our area anyway, the [policy] area, that the data and the publications are very good, best practices ... Principally as a validation of what we're doing rather than a significant inspiration. I think Canada sits up there with the Nordic countries has been kind of one of the better managed if you look at all of the indicators.</p>
010/201213	X			X	<p>I'm not so sure we set a lot of standards through the OECD, but what we do is we develop tools. And what's important for us is to make sure as global regulators we are all using the same tools. Because if we are not, that's where – if you will – the standards that we've set from the use of those tools, those standards are very different.</p>
013/200114	X		X		<p>I would say that the particular area where we consistently well served by the OECD is the work they do on [policy]. And it serves us very directly in terms of helping the agency articulate its expectations when going to Ottawa to renew funding envelopes.</p> <p>It served us very well in some recent policy</p>

					analysis work that we've done where we're, you know, just kind of looking at, ensuring that our innovation programming is where it should be, and part of the analysis that we did around that was looking at international and national and regional trends around innovation. The OECD was a, was a fount of knowledge in that respect.
015/210114	X		X		<p>I think especially a lot of it is based on its, its history and credibility but it's built up over the years.</p> <p>I would say it's still very relevant. Particularly in terms of the statistical capacity that it has that allows for more evidence to tracking [contributions]...for example. I think that its policy work, the analytical work it does, is definitely relevant. I think it needs to probably do a better job about showing its value-added. These are the other international organizations like the World Bank or the UNDP for example which will still, which will be talking about a lot of similar issues. But I think that that's part of the evolution.</p>
016/280114	X		X		<p>Our [policy] legislation is built off the policy principles of the OECD. We had a strategy for ten years that came straight out of the OECD ministerial meeting. ... a lot of what we do comes out of the best practices and the principles or recommendations that we have participated in developing at that organization. And as I previously mentioned, because we deal with a subject area that is so broad, it's new and ever changing, it probably changes faster than any other of the committees work there, we absolutely rely on the research that they do. Because we just cannot keep up, and they do a lot of foresight exercises, and we are just not there in terms of speaking as a</p>

					government in policy.
017/300114	X			X	I think it's useful for us because the [policy] you know, is often managed from a very sort of social sort perspective, with not necessarily much attention paid to economic issues. And the OECD, with its, you know, "we like to talk about policy analysis through an economic lens" – and so the application of economics can be helpful to doing things. You do the research at the OECD unit, it's sort of a ... safe kind of a way ... in a way that everyone's comfortable with, and then it can actually provide you know, an analytical backing for governments to do things.
018/300114	X		X		What they do is extremely relevant and certainly best practices. Because a lot of these best practices in policies find themselves in domestic best practices. So it sets a higher, a high watermark that agencies can sort of have aspiration direction to try and develop their guidance in line with that and vice versa.
019/030214	X		X		But there's no way we could come up with a, equivalent on our own. Where are all the resources? No way.
041/030214	X			X	It's the only organization that, not the only organization but the most important organization to provide a really good international what we call a benchmark.  So that's why the OECD is important because of having a good benchmark on countries that we want to be compared with or against.
022/040214	X			X	We look at our own sort of experience, we look at what we all can understand through the OECD internationally and more broadly,

					and you look obviously domestically at the government's priorities, and provinces and public affairs and attitudes, and so on. It's a key input.
023/050214	X		X		Yes, and for that reason we have a very good example, that is the new deal for [policy] which was a product of the international dialogue process. ... And we helped during that process leading up to [its] endorsement... And now people, many people talk [it]. The US government, the US president was talking about it, the Secretary-General of the UN was talking about it, UK was talking about it. ... We are trying to use the international forum to create that international momentum to work on something that's very important. And so far – being creating that well.
029/130214	X			X	It is very broad membership agreeing on common approaches, and to make sure that law of other international organizations in the areas I deal with, deal with the technical aspects of the operational aspects.
031/140214	X		X		I would say it's the only reliable source of [policy] data in the world okay. There are other sources of data – UN, World Bank, for the economic and social statistics for countries that are developing countries, but in terms of ...statistics on their [policy], the only place you are going to go is to the OECD.... You can go to individual ... websites now I guess, but then, you know the fiscal year might be different, the currency will be different, so it is totally relied on and it is relied on by the G7 and G8, anybody internationally, it is it.

We have categorized the relevance as either “yes” or “no”, and “direct” or “indirect.” As anticipated, all the respondents replied that the OECD was relevant for policy development within their departments. Some responses were qualified, and some were adamant, but in no case did anyone say that there was no influence whatsoever. Slightly less than half of the respondents (9 of 21) said that the effect was direct, while most thought that the influence was indirect. It should be noted that the instances of “direct” influence did not always cite examples, or if they did, the examples were relatively minor, so we think that “indirect influence” is a more robust and accurate characterization of OECD impact. This would be true for several reasons. First, the OECD is a member organization with virtually no coercive capacity over its members, and so its influence will be indirect almost by definition. Second, the OECD is principally a research organization, a convening site, and at best the promulgator of loose standards. None of these translated easily into “direct” influence. Third, Canada is a participant – and in some cases a leading participant – in developing OECD standards, and in those cases it is not the OECD as such (as an external body) that influences Canada, but Canada (the relevant department) influencing itself. Fourth, in most policy cases, Canada is among the top performers (Friedman, 2012),<sup>6</sup> and so the scope of borrowing would be less than for a country like, say, Chile (a recent accession member).

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<sup>6</sup> Friedman’s book is an analysis of key policy deficits in the US, through the lens of six comparator nations, of which Canada is one. Using various international governance and policy metrics (Arndt & Oman, 2006; Buduru & Pal, 2010), the book (in a back-handed way) shows Canada to be usually in the middle, and frequently a “star”.

That said, several clear conclusions arise from the list of quotes (and the wider interviews themselves) in Exhibit 6, and most of these echo various analyses of the OECD as an organization cited at the beginning of this paper. The strongest consensus is around the OECD as a producer of quality, comparative data. It does this primarily through surveys of members and non-members on a wide variety of subjects (a good example in the governance field is *Governance at a Glance* (OECD, 2011)). While other international organizations like the UN, the World Bank and the EU produce mountains of statistics as well, the OECD efforts are in part driven by the members themselves and their interests, and so tend to be more relevant. At one time of course, the OECD was the only game in town. But even with competitors, it still has a comparative advantage. A full discussion of the influence of statistics as measures would take us into deep epistemological waters, but the simple point is that any measurement or statistic is based on underlying concepts – to measure “corruption” for example, requires having some sort of concept about what corruption is. So the OECD’s efforts in producing data are simultaneously a way of demarking the perimeters and the content of policy fields.

Another influence is through standards or benchmarks. This is more than simply declaring a standard in the hope that others will follow it. The OECD still has a substantial reservoir of credibility, both for the overall objectivity of its analysis and its quality. Moreover, it is a club of reasonably successful countries. So, when the OECD pronounces a standard or a benchmark, it carries weight as a global “gold standard” (Pertti Alasuutari & Ari Rasimus, 2009; Lodge, 2005). Moreover, from a domestic point of view, this can form a sort of “cover” in putting forward positions within the domestic policy arena. The fact that

a proposal has the imprimatur of OECD practice and the good company of comparable states gives it additional credibility.

Linked to this is the role that the OECD sometimes plays in articulating policies that dare not speak their name. The OECD's 2010 Economic Survey of Canada (OECD, 2010), for example, had a special section criticizing the Canadian health care system. As a respondent noted, this critique challenged some aspects of the single-payer system, something that is virtually anathema among Canadian policy makers. Yet once the report had been issued, various provinces launched reviews (sometimes quietly) to address the very same issues. An outside view, in other words, can provide support for what would otherwise be difficult policy conversations, but the OECD is a credible marker in those conversations because it is broadly respected and because it has a reputation for being the repository of "best practices."

#### **4. Conclusions**

This paper opened with a discussion of IGOs and their influence on domestic public management trends. There is a debate about the autonomy of these IGOs – whether they are simply vehicles for their most powerful members to impose models on others, or whether they develop some institutional autonomy. Our analysis here has focused on only one side of the relationship – representatives of a government (Canada) – and one organization – the OECD. However, even with these limited data and limited focus, it is possible to arrive at a few reasonably confident conclusions.

First, it's clear that we need to break out of the brittle logic of "either-or." Our data

show that the OECD is an influential organization in terms of its research, data, credibility, models, and as a venue for government officials from around the world to learn from each other and compare approaches and models. These officials are not simply policy takers. They are participants in the shaping of the data, the research, and the models. They influence the organization, and in turn the organization influences them. Or more precisely, they seize on elements of the OECD to calibrate and steer their own domestic, departmental policy agendas. Detailed case studies would show this more clearly, but we can cite one example here that was mentioned by interviewees from several departments: the OECD's 2010 Economic Survey of Canada (OECD, 2010). That Survey made some iconoclastic (for Canadian ears, anyway) recommendations about essentially injecting more privately paid services into the Canadian public health care system. Officials from several departments supplied data for the report, but the OECD review team drafted it on its own. Officials knew that their recommendations would be controversial, thought they might be useful, but were generally agnostic since health is a provincial jurisdiction.

Second, our data show a remarkable fluidity and variability in the way in which officials and agencies and departments in the government organize their interactions with the OECD. As we noted above, this may be due to the nature of the OECD itself. It sprawls across so many policy fields that it invites member states to be involved in a host of policy fields if they wish – from tourism to agriculture to health and to telecommunications. Virtually every department has some connection to the OECD. This would be different with the IMF, for example, which would connect principally and almost exclusively with the Department of Finance, the Bank of Canada, and central cabinet offices. However,

even given this variety of interactions with the OECD, it would not be impossible to imagine at least the attempt of central control and coordination (perhaps through DFATD). Indeed, given the putative strictures of a Westminster system, it might be assumed that hierarchy and control would characterize the relationship. We found the opposite. The structures, even within departments, are variable and entirely fluid or networked. Much seems to depend on informal understandings, practices, and even personalities. Officials, in doing their jobs, manage to balance formal processes and structures with networked tools to achieve results. So, often what appears to be a “Government of Canada” response or intervention with the OECD, is actually a complicated result of recombinant dynamics within and across agencies.

Third, we should not lose site of the fluidity of the overall relationship between the government players on the one hand, and the OECD itself. Within the government, for example, we heard several references to having to defend the resources and time that go into the relationship with the OECD. With fiscal pressures, it might seem simpler and cheaper to simply channel all interaction through the Permanent Delegation. On the OECD side, the organization is itself under constant pressure to make itself relevant on a slippery global landscape of competing IGOs.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, students of public management need to deepen their understanding of the interaction between states and IGOs in terms of the debate, discussion, adjustment and adoption of public management ideas and practices. Too much analysis is undertaken as if

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<sup>7</sup> See the 2014 forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* (editor: Leslie A. Pal) for discussion and analysis of these challenges.

public management and public policy in country/state X is almost completely internal to country/state X. That never held up very well in the past, and certainly does not now. Policy development today – including policies on public management structures and practices – take place within a panopticon of international observation and measurement by international organizations (Arndt & Oman, 2006; Besançon, 2003; Buduru & Pal, 2010; Davis, Fisher, Kingsbury, & Merry, 2012; Friedman, 2012; OECD, 2007; Pollitt, 2011; Porter, 2012). Practitioners are well aware of this, and recognize that the canvas of public management reform is coloured from a palette of recommendations and advice that is global, not merely local.

## Appendix A

### Survey Questionnaire

**Note: Questions 1 – 7 were identification questions.**

**8. What is the nature of your Branch/Sector's contact with the OECD? You may choose more than one response.**

Main Committee

Working Group

Expert Committee

General OECD Secretariat/Office

Canadian representative at the Permanent Delegation to the OECD

Other (please specify)

**9. If your Branch/Sector interacts with a main committee, or has a representative serve on one, which committee is it? You may choose more than one response**

Chemicals

Agriculture

Information, Computer and Communications Policy

Scientific and Technological Policy

Consumer Policy

Financial Markets

Fiscal Affairs

Industry, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Statistics

Competition

Remuneration

Corporate Governance

Development Assistance

Economic and Development Review

Economic Policy

Education Policy

Employment, Labour and Social Affairs

Environment Policy

Fisheries  
Health  
Insurance and Private Pensions  
Investment  
Joint OECD/ITF Transport Research  
Public Governance  
Regulatory Policy  
Steel  
Nuclear Energy  
Territorial Development Policy  
Tourism  
Trade  
Other (please specify)

**10. In your Branch/Sector, how are officials who will work with the OECD selected?  
You may choose more than one response.**

Attached to position  
Based on experience  
Based on expertise/knowledge  
Based on interest to interact with OECD  
Nominated by senior management  
I do not know  
Other (please specify)

**11. What channels does your Branch/Sector normally use to interact with the OECD?  
You may choose more than one response.**

OECD directly (e.g. Committee, Secretariat)  
Through the Canadian Delegation  
Through the DFATD  
Through the PCO  
Through the Treasury Board Secretariat  
Through Finance  
Through another unit in your Department  
Other (please specify)

**12. How many times a year is your Branch/Sector in contact with the Paris-based Canadian delegation?**

<3

3-10

11-20

21-50

50+

Other (please specify)

**13. On average, how many FTE days per year are devoted by your Branch/Sector to working with the OECD?**

<3

3-10

11-20

21-50

50+

Other (please specify)

**14. In your career as a federal government official, how many years have you worked with the OECD?**

<1

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

20+

**15. How long have you worked with the OECD in your current role?**

<1

1-2

3-5

6-10

10+

**16. Of your work with the OECD, how would you rank the frequency of your involvement in the following activities in 2012?**

Meetings at the OECD (Paris)

Meetings with OECD officials in Ottawa

Video conferencing

Survey coordination

Survey completion

Contributing research and analysis to draft reports/documents

Preparing briefing notes for senior officials to participate in OECD activities

Other (please specify)

International meetings sponsored by the OECD outside Paris

Conference calls with OECD officials

Reviewing and commenting on draft reports/documents

**17. Of your work with the OECD, how would you rank the importance of the following activities for Canada's influence on OECD policy development?**

Meetings at the OECD (Paris)

Meetings with OECD officials in Ottawa

Conference calls with OECD officials

Survey coordination

Survey completion

Reviewing and commenting on draft reports/documents

International meetings sponsored by the OECD outside Paris

Contributing research and analysis to draft reports/documents

Preparing briefing notes for senior officials to participate in OECD activities

**18. For your policy area, how would you rank the importance to Canada's policy development and implementation of the following OECD products and activities?**

Access to OECD data

Access to OECD reports

Involvement in creating OECD reports

Involvement in identify OECD project priorities

Other (please specify)

Access to OECD best practices

Involvement in creating OECD models and standards

Discussions with OECD members

- 19. In your judgment, what have been the most relevant, major OECD reports or publications for your Department in the past 10 years?**
- 20. In your judgment, are there other international governmental agencies that are particularly important to your Department? Which ones?**

## Appendix B

### Interview Questionnaire

1. Does your Department have systems and/or structures in place to support the sharing of information about interactions with the OECD across the Department?
2. Does your branch circulate the results of your interactions with the OECD to other parts of your Department?
3. If yes, how?
4. If yes, to whom?
5. Do you frequently communicate with colleagues in your department who interact with the OECD?
6. What criteria does your department use to make decisions about its level of involvement with the OECD?
7. How much support is there in your branch to interact with the OECD?
8. How much support is there in your department to interact with the OECD?
9. Does your department circulate the results of your interactions with the OECD to other departments?
10. If yes, how?
11. If yes, to whom?
12. Do you frequently communicate with colleagues in other departments who interact with the OECD?
13. In your judgment, is your department's overall level of involvement in the OECD sufficient? Why?
14. In your judgment, is the OECD an important source of "best practice" in the policy fields relevant to your department?
15. In your judgment, how relevant is the OECD for the development of departmental policy? By "relevance" I mean having a direct or indirect influence on policy.
16. In your judgment, is your department getting value-for-money from its participation in OECD-related activities?
17. If yes, in your judgement, what is the benefit of participation?
18. If no, in your judgement, why are the benefits of participation not being realized?
19. Are you aware of any countries that have adopted Canadian best practices featured by the OECD? Examples?
20. Do you have any suggestions for improving the value of the OECD to your

department and the government more generally?

21. Do you have anything else to add about the Canadian government's interaction with the OECD?
22. Is there anyone else in your department or in other departments who we should contact to learn more about the interaction between the Canadian Government and the OECD?

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