

EDITORIAL

My first paper was published in about 5 months from being submitted. At the time I thought this was slow: my sister, who was a physicist, had her first paper published in 6 weeks. This was in the antediluvian times of hand composition.

Mathematicians nowadays consider a publication delay well in excess of a year as inevitable and normal. They need, however, much faster spread of their ideas, and the result has been a mushrooming of fast semi-publications and a wide dissemination of preprints.

Meanwhile editorial offices of serious mathematical journals are flooded with meritorious manuscripts, more than they can publish without great delay. A choice has to be made, and in order that justice be done to authors, manuscripts are submitted to a rigorous and detailed refereeing procedure before being accepted or rejected or, frequently, returned to the authors for revision. Refereeing is an honorary, and often onerous, service to the mathematical community, and editors are reluctant to press referees to give this work high priority; the more so as editors know, and referees know, that further long delays arise in the processes of producing the printed journal. Thus delays breed delays.

When the *JOURNAL of the Australian Mathematical Society* found itself caught in this vicious circle of delays and a surfeit of publishable papers, it increased its number of pages to the limit of financial endurance of the Society; this helped, but was not enough. So the Society decided to embark on the publication of the *BULLETIN of the Australian Mathematical Society*, the first number of which is now before you. To relieve the pressure on the *JOURNAL*, the *BULLETIN* has taken over from it a number of papers that had been accepted for publication, but that would have had to wait a long time in the queue: one of them, to illustrate my point, had been submitted more than 3 years ago, but most of them much more recently.

One of my principal aims as editor is to ensure a return to fast publication. My target is a median of 5 months from *receipt* of a paper. This requires a great speeding up of the production processes, and we have accordingly, like others before us, gone in for photo-offset printing from

a typescript. The price we have to pay is that many founts and symbols that mathematicians like to use are not readily available to us. But authors who have used typewriters will, I hope, understand and forgive.

Speeding up production is not all; the pre-production processes must also be abbreviated. Thus I want to keep refereeing as light as possible. I am prepared to accept responsibility for making many decisions myself, without the assistance of expert referees. Where a referee's opinion has to be sought, the referee ought not to be expected to spend much time and work on forming an opinion. If a paper needs more than, say, half a day's work from a referee, its case for speedy publication is not strong enough, and it should go to a different journal. If a paper needs revision, again it has to go elsewhere. This throws much responsibility on the authors - where it belongs. Many authors have come to rely on the referees' advice to improve their papers. I hold that if authors need this advice, and inexperienced authors (but not only inexperienced ones) often do, they should obtain it *before* submitting their papers: a paper that is to be published in the *BULLETIN of the Australian Mathematical Society* must be in its final, publishable form when it is submitted. I have rejected ruthlessly, and expect to have to continue to do so.

Nevertheless a time may come when more good papers are submitted than can be fitted in quickly; then some papers will be returned to their authors at once, so that they can try elsewhere without delay: I hope these authors will also understand, and forgive.

Effective communication of mathematical ideas does not end with publication in a learned journal: this is the starting point of the reviewing journals, the *Mathematical Offprint Service*, the *Contents of Contemporary Mathematical Journals*. To ease and speed their service to mathematicians, the *BULLETIN of the Australian Mathematical Society* will cooperate with them in various ways: the (tentative) MOS classification numbers in the top right corner of each paper's first page, and the abstract that heads each paper, are examples. We rely on authors to help us by supplying the abstracts and checking (or supplying) the MOS classifications.



Editor